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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE NAVY IN NARRAGANSETT BAY





HISTORY  
OF THE  
NAVY IN NARRAGANSETT BAY

NO. 6

REAR ADMIRAL JOHN WADLEIGH  
USN (RET)

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

1985



## PREFACE

This volume contains the transcript of four hours of taped interviews with Rear Admiral John Wadleigh, USN (Ret.). The interviews were conducted by Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak, Head of the Naval Historical Collection, in May and June 1985 for the Naval War College Oral History project entitled "The History of the Navy in Narragansett Bay."

Rear Admiral Wadleigh's family has had a long tradition of naval service; both his paternal and maternal grandfathers were rear admirals and his father, as well as his father-in-law, were Marine Corps officers. His naval career has been a long and distinguished one, including graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1937, and service in World War II in the Pacific Theatre where he survived the sinking of the YORKTOWN at Midway in June 1942. During the war, he received instruction in communications and subsequently served as staff Communications Officer with Commander, Cruisers-Destroyers, Pacific Fleet. With the war's end in sight, he reported as Operations Officer on the staff of Commander, Cruiser Division Sixteen, where he participated in the final campaign against Japan.

In the postwar period he attended the Armed Forces Staff College and served as communications instructor at the General Line School in Newport, RI. He commanded the USS JOHN R. PIERCE (DD 753), USS GRAND CANYON (AD 28), and USS SPRINGFIELD (CLG 7), as well as Escort Squadron 16, Cruiser Destroyer Flotillas Four and Twelve, and Training Command, Atlantic Fleet. He served ashore in other communications billets as Deputy Director, Naval Communications, Navy Department, and as Director of Operations for the Defense Communications System, Defense Communications Agency.



On June 30, 1971, Rear Admiral Wadleigh retired from active duty, and in 1974 settled in Newport, RI, an area where he had lived and summered as a youth. Since then he has been active in community and naval affairs; he has served as President of Seaport '76 and the local chapter of the US Naval Academy Association and is a member of many local clubs and associations. His reminiscences of the Jamestown/Newport area and his recollections of the Navy in the Narragansett Bay area will be of interest to researchers of this time period.

Both Rear Admiral Wadleigh and Dr. Cherpak have read and edited the typescript and have made some changes for clarity.





Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the Naval War College

Interviewee: Rear Admiral John Wadleigh, USN (RET)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the Navy in Narragansett Bay

Date: May 20, 1985

C: This is the first oral history interview with Rear Admiral John Wadleigh of Newport, R.I. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection.

Today's date is Monday, May 20, 1985. The interview is taking place in my office at the Naval Historical Collection. Rear Admiral Wadleigh, I've been looking forward to this interview for some time because you've had a distinguished career and long personal connections with the Jamestown/Newport area and can tell us much about it in days past.

Rear Admiral Wadleigh, can you tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your parents and family background?

W: I was born in Washington, D.C. at the Garfield Hospital on September 24, 1915. My father, (at that time) Major John Wadleigh, US Marine Corps, was stationed at the Naval Academy as Executive Officer of the Marine Barracks. My mother's family lived in Washington; my mother's father was retired Rear Admiral George C. Remey, US Navy. He and my grandmother lived at 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, right opposite where the Dupont Plaza Hotel is now located, just north of Dupont Circle.

I was the first grandchild in the family and nothing was too good for me. Instead of having a baby in Annapolis my mother came to stay with her family



W: and I was born in Garfield Hospital. Actually in those days, I think one was in the hospital two weeks, After mother left Garfield Hospital, we stayed with the Remeys for another month and then went back to Annapolis, where we had quarters at the Naval Academy over by what is now Gate 8.

C: You mentioned that one of your grandfathers, I think both of them, had a naval background, isn't that so?

W: That is correct. My other grandfather who lived in Lexington, Massachusetts, and was alive at that time was Rear Admiral George Henry Wadleigh, US Navy retired. He was about three years younger than my Grandfather Remey.

C: During your early years you must have lived in a variety of places because, of course, your father was in the military and the Marine Corps as you mentioned. Do you remember any of the places that you lived in or any tours of duty that he had that were especially outstanding for you as a youngster?

W: My memories start, dimly, when I was in the three year old category. My father remained at the Naval Academy until sometime in late 1916, as I recall, when he was ordered to Haiti. The Marines had in 1915 gone into Haiti to bring some type of order out of the anarchy in that country. And by 1916 there was a brigade of Marines stationed at Port-au-Prince and Cape Haitien. My father was ordered down there in late 1916.

By that time my mother had another youngster on the way, so she did not go. Father was down there for almost ten months alone before we followed him





W: down. In the interim my mother had her second child, which turned out to be twins. They both died on the day of birth. We followed down to Haiti, my mother, myself, and a Scotch nurse sometime in October 1917. We were in Haiti for just about a year and I have dim memories of that; there are many families photographs and so on of that period.

C: Was your father in Port-au-Prince or Cape Haitien?

W: My father was in Port-au-Prince when we arrived. I don't remember his exact job. I believe he was on the brigade staff at that time, which was in Port-au-Prince. But in early 1918, we drove across the island of Haiti to Cape Haitien and lived there for another eight months where he was Executive Officer of the Regiment stationed in Cape Haitien.

C: Your mother must have been quite adventurous to follow him.

W: She was. We had a Chevrolet car, that I can recall, and we chugged our way across. We stopped in Gonaives, which I visited many years later when I was in the fleet. There was a little town there and a small Marine detachment and a Navy doctor; we stayed a night there and then went on across. The only way we got across was to have the car carried across the waters of two rivers with native labor. We had one Marine driver and my father and two others besides myself in the car, and it was a two day trip for us. Pretty grim road. There's a picture of many natives just lifting the car across for which they were paid a few cents each.



C: Haiti is still very poor and I imagine it must have been terrible, just as poor then and depressed as it is now.

W: I would guess it was a little less depressed in that they had less blood shed and so on than in the past fifty years after the marines left. We had a nice house in Cape Haitien; there were three marines, I think, living near by as guards, and we had several black servants. We had chickens, we had a burro there and so on. It was tropical living.

C: But interesting. So you were there a total of about eighteen months?

W: No, we were there a little over a year. I think it was about five months in Port-au-Prince and seven across in Cape Haitien. We came home just before the war ended, sailing through the submarine zones, incidentally, going each way. I don't remember much of that, except I do remember having a life jacket on at times, as a pretty small boy.

C: Well, you have a good memory if you can recall things from age three. I don't think I can remember a thing from my childhood at that age. Where did you go after you returned to the United States? Where was your father posted?

W: We were coming home; he was to be posted to France where the Marines then had four regiments, but with the armistice they cancelled all the orders for people going over and my father went to the Marine Barracks in Washington, which is now known and was known as "Eighth and Eye." He was Executive Officer and then Commanding Officer at the Marine barracks for the next two years.





C: So you were in the Washington area then. Do you ever remember going to the Headquarters or witnessing any of the ceremonies, regimental or whatever, connected with the marines?

W: Quite well. I am a music buff. My mother was very musical. Having the US Marine band stationed there I was present every morning they were parading, when they let me out of the house.

The Commandant, General Barnett, lived there, and he was relieved by General John LeJeune who had the Marine brigade and later the Second Division (Army) in France. I remember them as famous Marine Officers and friends of my father's. We had one of the five sets of quarters on that post which looked out on the parade ground and on the back out on Eighth Street, S.E. in Washington. Then it was not quite the same type of area it is now.

C: I don't know the area myself. Do you remember General Smedley Butler at all?

W: Yes, in our next station, from Marine Barracks, Washington. Incidentally, my brother George was born in 1920, just before we left. We moved to Quantico when he was about two months old in November 1920. Quantico was the biggest Marine post at the time. It is now the headquarters of all their schools. General Smedley Butler was commanding in Quantico at that time and I have memories of him. Actually in age he was pretty close to a contemporary with my father, but he had been promoted very rapidly for his combat experience and had been in France as a general officer. He came back and he had the post at Quantico the whole time we were there.





C: I see. He was also involved in Central America and Nicaragua. I do remember him from that connection. Are there any other outstanding Marines? You mentioned General LeJeune from the previous post that your father held. Do you remember anything in particular about him? Did your father ever say anything about him in later years?

W: I know he admired him greatly. We knew General LeJeune later; he summered in Jamestown. My mother was a good friend of Mrs. LeJeune, even more so of the daughters who were more her age. I can't say that I have any real memories of him as a man, but I know he was a highly respected and great commandant of the corps.

C: So you were in Quantico for a while and was it at that period of time in your life that you began to summer in Jamestown, when you were a young boy, six, seven, eight?

W: I was five in Quantico, and we had been there about a year when my father received orders to go to sea as the Fleet Marine Officer. The summer would be hot in Quantico; he was to be detached sometime in the summer so mother wanted to go up to Jamestown where she had been as a girl during summers, and where her family was that summer in 1921. That took us to Jamestown in June of 1921.

C: Did you rent a place there or did you have a family homestead?

W: In those days a lot of people summered at the hotels, the big hotels there in Jamestown, of which there were four at that time.



C: Do you remember their names per chance?

W: My grandfather, grandmother, and my maiden aunt summered at the Bayview Hotel, which still stands. They had previously summered at the Gardner house for some ten summers there. The Gardner house burned down sometime around 1930. My mother rented a small cottage that summer of 1921 up on Conanicut Avenue, which is known as East Shore Road now. That house still stands. We actually lived there for three summers; we would arrive in early June and leave in mid-September.

C: You had a nice long stay then, enjoying the cooling breezes of the shore. What were summers like in Jamestown? What did you do for amusement? What did people in general do for amusement?

W: It was a typical summer offshoot of Newport. People who could not afford the big cottages and the few hotels in Newport flocked to Jamestown, and Jamestown drew basically two groups of people, one from Philadelphia and one from St Louis. This has gone on since about nineteen hundred.

C: I wonder why it attracted people from those two American cities? Do you have any idea? Was it just coincidence?

W: I would say the Philadelphia people came possibly because they were not interested in getting into the "four hundred" set in Newport. I can't really tell you about the St. Louis group except they were built around four families, and, as I remember, Shoreby Hill, which is the mid-section of Jamestown, There's still a lot of cottages there, many built, you might say,





W: by St. Louis people. Others moved out toward the sea down at the south end of the island. I have no way of knowing why the St. Louis people actually came there.

C: These were civilians, industrialists and bankers.

W: Yes. But Jamestown offered boating on the bay and so on; it had swimming facilities, and the first group of people came and set up life, a central, you might say, club or a place to eat. Their cottages were built on Shoreby Hill, and they would go down and have their lunches and dinners at what was known as the Casino, right on East Shore. The Casino still stands, although now it is a residence.

C: Was it a restaurant per se?

W: It was a club really, and instead of eating in a hotel like my grandparents did, it was all American Plan. In those days, most of these people would come down and eat at the Casino and there would be parties there and card playing. It was a nice club that existed until after World War II. But the meals stopped before World War I. Shoreby residents ate at home.

C: Did the Philadelphia group stay together too?

W: Yes, they did. They lived down more towards the south end, although there were some on the hill. Then there was a third, you might say summer resident



W: class, who came in. These were retired Navy. Narragansett Bay had always seen Navy ships in the summer and a lot of the officers had had duty here or knew the Navy was here. They liked to watch the ships as the fleet had grown. That is what I think brought my grandfather in 1904. Shortly after he retired, he started coming to Jamestown each summer.

C: That's Grandfather Remy.

W: Grandfather Remy, yes. The Remeys went to the Gardner House first and then the Bayview. You asked what they did. My grandfather used to like to walk; I don't think he ever sailed much. He loved to sit and talk with his cronies. Of course there were maybe as many as twelve retired admirals staying at the hotel.

C: Do you remember any of the names of the retired admirals?

W: Yes. Bradley Fiske was one of them, Reginald Nicholson another. I remember Bradley Fiske particularly because I ran across him later and have written about him. Besides Admiral Nicholson, there was Admiral Coffman, who was considerably younger than my grandfather; he built a house on Shoreby Hill, and Admiral Bush, who was a brother-in-law of Coffman's. I'm sure if I looked at the Navy directory, it would bring forth three or four more names. The ladies used to also sit on the hotel porch, in a separate group after dinner. We used to call them the rocking chair brigade. The men would take their cigars and smoke and tell sea stories.





W: These hotels were built close to the ferry, where the ferry from Newport came over, and next to that was a little landing where the ships' boats, were. When the ships were in port a lot of the officers would stay in Jamestown; they had their families there. There would be a morning boat to take them out to the ships and afternoon boats coming in. The retired admirals would comment on the seamanship of the boats and the way the ships in the bay looked. They had a pleasant summer. There was a golf course there; some of them undoubtedly played golf. My mother learned to drive a car. The first car she ever saw was in Jamestown. She was a girl of about eighteen when she learned to drive, first member of her family to try it out.

C: New fangled machine. Was there much fraternizing between the three groups that you mentioned?

W: I think, by the time I remember, there was plenty. Earlier the hotel people and cottage people crossed paths. I think there was because mother certainly had friends when she was in the debutante stage when they first went there. And in 1909 she met my father in Jamestown.

C: Oh, she did.

W: He had come to the War College as a student in the class of 1909 as a Captain of Marines. He had been told by his father, who knew my grandfather Remey although they never served together, to go over and pay his respects to Admiral Remey. My father came over and dutifully paid his respects to Admiral Remey, who had two daughters living with him, my mother's older sister and mother.





C: What was your mother's older sister's name?

W: Angelica. She was four years older than mother. She had a physical problem; she was a little lame and was never the outgoing girl my mother was. My mother had been to Miss Wheeler's School in Providence and graduated by the time my grandfather came here to retired. She had "finished", as they used to say in those days. She loved riding, music, and boating. My father came over to pay his respects and started coming back again and I'm not sure either girl knew which one he was coming over to see because people were pretty formal in those days. He took mother sailing in the summer of 1909. I sometimes wonder how much studying he did at the War College; it was only a three month course then.

C: But he spent time in Jamestown, too, going over to visit.

W: I think he proposed to her at Beaver Tail, but I'm not sure.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting. So you have very apparent Jamestown connections. That's very interesting, the story of your parents in Jamestown. When you summered in Jamestown, did you ever take the ferry to Newport or did you just mainly stay on the island?

W: No, we went over quite often. The ferries ran every half hour in the summer season and every hour in the winter. In the winter they stopped at eight o'clock at night, but in summer they went on till about eleven. I can remember going to Newport to the movies or going over with my mother



W: shopping. Once, I was about twelve, I went to the tennis matches. That was the first time. People went over for things in Newport. It was only a twenty minute trip, one dollar per car; in those days fifteen cents per passenger.

C: Were there any entertainments at all in Jamestown?

W: Yes, the Casino had regular dances; they had a children's dance on Monday night.

C: How old did you have to be to qualify for that?

W: As I remember, you had to be eight to twelve. Then there was a young peoples dance, I think Friday nights, and the seniors' dance on Saturdays. There was something practically every night at the Casino for some age group. It was the days of prohibition, so the social life of the adults was a little different than it is now, boot leg stuff and that sort of thing.

C: I was going to ask if they had boot-leg liquor or if there was strict adherence to prohibition.

W: We summered in Jamestown every summer from the time I was five years old until I went to the Naval Academy. We were there each summer, and in that house I mentioned first for three summers.

C: Did your mother rent after that?





W: She rented two other times; my father died in 1923, which was before our third summer there. He died at sea. She was left a widow with two small children. I was seven, my brother was two at the time. Instead of going back to Washington and so on, she made Newport her winter base, renting over here also. So that's when I really started living in this area, 1922.

C: At a very early age. Getting back to the Jamestown business, you mentioned there were entertainments in the summer at the Casino. Did they have any plays, or concerts, or restaurants where people went to?

W: There were hotel dining rooms. For the first three years I remember there were four hotels that had dining rooms. There were boarding houses in Jamestown; that's another element I did not mention. There were quite a few boarding houses which included meals, not just bed and breakfast. I don't remember any real restaurants. With regards to plays, there was a movie theatre that started there around 1923 and still stands on Narragansett Avenue. It's now shops. Over in Newport, of course, there were four movie theatres and there was the Casino theatre which started in the twenties with plays each summer.

C: Oh, in Newport. When you came up from Washington, how did you get to Newport physically? What mode of transportation did you take? Transport has changed so much over time.

W: The first time we came up, we came from Quantico. I think we drove to Washington and took the train up.



C: And now the train took you to where? Was it Providence?

W: The nearest stop for the train was Wickford, which is between Kingston and Providence. There was another way of taking the train to New York and then taking the Fall River boat, the night boat, from New York to Fall River and then coming down here either by train or by car.

C: So there was a train from Fall River to Newport.

W: Yes.

C: Where was the station in Newport?

W: Right where the present railroad, that little railroad goes in.

C: Oh yes, there was a little Newport railroad.

W: From Fall River you could go either to Providence, to Newport, or New Bedford; there was quite a network of rails in Rhode Island.

C: Yes, making it easier for the summer tourist to get here, making it less isolated to some degree.

W: On the other side, the Wickford side, there was a boat that ran from Wickford down to Newport and stopped at the north end of Conanicut Island, where the Jamestown people could get off. I never did that, but I think my



W: grandparents made that journey. Then Kingston, which is even now a junction, was a stop and that's where people got off for Narragansett Pier, which was another summer colony rivaling Newport in many ways. Quite wealthy people over there.

C: Did you ever go over to Narragansett Pier?

W: Yes. We had a west ferry, too; it went from Jamestown to Saunderstown, and ran in conjunction with the Newport ferry. You could even walk across the island, just about make it between ferries on foot. Most people took cars but you could do it, about ten minute break there.

C: Do you remember anything in particular about Narragansett Pier? Did you have any experiences with that area?

W: No, it was the best swimming. It was surf swimming. We did not have surf swimming in Jamestown because the cove was protected there, at least one didn't see too much. They had a very fine beach. That's my primary remembrance of Narragansett Pier.

C: Did you have a special beach in Jamestown that you went to?

W: We usually used for a beach what is the town beach called Mackerel Cove. But we also swam right in front of the Bay Voyage Hotel, which was on the bay. No one seemed to worry about pollution in those days. There were





W: usually ships anchored in the bay, quite a few most summers, and an awful lot of Jamestown pumped everything into the bay near that beach. That is where the nurses would take the kids down; we had a Scotch nurse, who stayed with us long after my father died. She became sort of a helper of all kinds in the house with my mother. She would take my brother and I down to the beach. From our first cottage there it was a short walk down. The nurses would all meet and pass the time of day while the kids ran around the beach; it was a pretty nice life at that time.

C: It sounds very relaxing. Did your mother have any other help other than the Scotch nurse when she was in Jamestown? Did she have a maid or a cook?

W: She had a cook at that time. We had a sergeant's wife from Fort Wetherell in the garrison there. Fort Wetherell is now done away with; it's a state park. It was a small post in 1922. And then my Scotch nurse had a sister who worked with us for a couple of years; she came over right after World War I. She'd been through all the air raids in London and so on. She would tell me stories of them in some detail. She stayed over here and ran a bakery in Washington for many years, well into the 50's.

C: People did need help in those days. Housekeeping was more difficult and without the labor saving devices that we have today.

W: It was a way of life. Nobody got rich in the service, but you could afford to have domestic help. In researching the War College history, the families that came up here all either had a servant or else they lived in a boarding house where all meals were served.



C: You mentioned that there were many ships anchored in Narragansett Bay, and I think I remember reading from the book that you wrote that your father was on a ship that was there during one summer and you went aboard. Is that not correct, and can you tell me something about that experience?

W: Yes, that is correct. He reported as a Fleet Marine Officer sometime in the summer of 1921. The Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, Admiral Hiliary Jones at the time, had his flag in the battleship WYOMING and he was in Newport periodically that summer. I remember going aboard. The next summer he was still in the same job and Admiral Jones had moved his flag twice in the interim. He was on the brand new battleship MARYLAND. I remember going on her also.

C: For a tour of the ship then?

W: Yes, and I went out for lunch once or twice in the wardroom.

C: That must have been a thrill.

W: In fact, after my father died, my mother's friends kept coming in with ships and I was a guest on several occasions, sitting alone in the captain's cabin with Captain Tarrant who later became a vice admiral, also Captain Adolphous Watson.

C: Andrews?





W: No, Adolphous Watson, A.E. Watson.

I have one memory of 1924 going aboard the Cruiser DETROIT, which was a brand new cruiser. From her I witnessed a horrible explosion, the MACKINAC Disaster in Newport. The MACKINAC, an excursion steamer, blew up off Coddington Point; she was on her way to Providence loaded with people and a boiler blew. There were over eighty people killed. We could see the ship. On the DETROIT they called away fire and rescue parties, and they sent all the boats they could muster. About twelve of us were guests of the captain's son. We stayed aboard for about three hours waiting to get ashore just because there were no boats, but we could see all the activity over there.

C: Well that sounded horrible. Were there any other incidents that you remember, anything special, anything unique that happened in the Jamestown summer when you were there prior to your entrance into the academy. You mentioned the MACKINAC Disaster thing.

W: Well, I remember the first America's Cup races in Newport, when Sir Thomas Lipton came over. I was fourteen that summer. By that time I was sailing and we had a boat. I did not mention earlier that one of the hubs in Jamestown life was the yacht club, the Conanicut Yacht club. My grandfather had been a member for years, although I don't think he was ever commodore of the club. It was his favorite pastime to go down for the afternoon and watch the racing and see friends. In the summer of 1930, Lipton came over with the British Challenger, SHAMROCK V. There was a lot of racing with small boats in the



W: bay. That was the first summer that mother bought a boat for my brother and myself.

C: What kind was that?

W: It was a pilot boat, a new 16 foot Knockabout, there were seven of them in Jamestown and they raced as a class. It was really a busy summer.

C: The summer of 1930.

W: The races, the cup races themselves, were held in September and I remember going out to one of them aboard the Fall River Liner COMMONWEALTH. They took some five hundred people aboard her and we went out for the day. It was about as interesting watching racing then as it is now; they don't move very fast. But it was a tremendous fleet of boats; it was quite, a real experience.

C: I'm sure it's a spectacle. So you obviously liked boating very much during your summers here. Did you have a opportunity to do much sailing prior to getting you own boat in 1930?

W: I got interested in sailing through a friend of mine, who was a Navy Junior, Hugo Osterhous. His grandfather was a contemporary of my grandfather and his father of my father. Both his grandfather and father were admirals. They summered in Jamestown much for the same reason my mother did. There was another cup race four years later, but by that time I had gone to the Naval



W: Academy and was back on September leave to see that one. I raced my own boat for the three summers until I went down to Annapolis. After that my brother raced it until World War II.

C: So during your youth in Jamestown you spent your time swimming and boating; those were your main sports, I assume. Was there anything else that you enjoyed doing there?

W: I enjoyed golf. I was never a good golfer. The fourth summer we lived in Jamestown, we moved up to a house that backed on the golf course and all the slices came into our yard with golf balls and I speedily learned to rush out, get that ball, and disappear. We had golfers coming in and they didn't want to trespass on our property and I wasn't too anxious to throw back the ball. I then used to caddy a bit too, although I would then compete with the island caddies and they didn't like that very much. I never was a regular caddy of the club. But I learned enough about golf to make me interested in it.

C: And you have been ever since.

W: Yes, that's correct.

C: Do you remember, in numbers, how large the summer colony in Jamestown was? Can you give any estimate of the three groups?





W: No, Jamestown in that time had a year around population of about fifteen hundred people and I would guess that there were probably a thousand or fifteen hundred more came up for the summer one way or another. A lot of people didn't spend all summer there, maybe a month or something like that.

C: So it's population just about doubled in the summer time.

W: What I didn't mention was that in a lot of the families that came up the husbands commuted probably not much further than Philadelphia for their work week, and then would come up by train for the weekend, going back Sunday night.

C: Well, I imagine your father wasn't there too often in the earlier years.

W: Well, he died in 1923, but those first two summers he was only there when the ship was in. I remember him home and taking walks with him and so on. I don't remember how often the ship was in the harbor. At that time the fleet was in, but they never were in as a fleet. There were normally ten to thirty ships in the bay in summer months.

C: You mentioned that your father died prematurely in 1923 and then your mother decided to make her permanent winter base in Newport, Rhode Island, where she rented homes and then summered in Jamestown. So, in effect, you did spend some of your early growing up years in Newport and you went to school there. Can you tell me what schools you went to as a young boy in Newport and where you lived in Newport?



W: Mother actually decided to move to Newport during the winter my father would be away, in 1922-23. The fleet would be in the Caribbean and then probably go back to the West Coast. He had orders to go to Fort Benning, Georgia, to the infantry school in the summer of 1923. We moved to Newport when Jamestown became a little chilly in September 1922 and rented a place next to the Channing Church. It stands now as 135 Pelham Street; it was an apartment. That move to Newport was partly caused by the fact that my grandmother was taken ill in the summer of 1922 and was put into Forest Farm Nursing Home, which still stands here in Middletown. So my grandfather decided to move to the cottage on Touro Park, which also still has one cottage left. At that time it was like a hotel, you ate there. So we moved over in 1922 and I went to Coddington School on Mill Street for that year and the next; it was a Newport Public School. I was in third and fourth grades there.

C: Do you remember anything about the town itself during those years at Coddington School?

W: The layout of the town, the hill, is just about the way it is now. My friends at school were from around where I lived. My best friend was the son of the chauffeur to Mr. Garrettson, who had a big house on the other side of Touro Park which still stands. Billy Regan lived in the garage above. There was an apartment above the garage for his father who drove a beautiful big Cadillac. Billy and I went to Coddington School together. Another schoolmate was Stanley Seaforth, who still lives; he's a sexton up at Trinity Church there. He was known as Porky in those days and still is people like that





W: then. Some of our class came over from Fort Adams. The Army ran a boat over and the school was only a block up from the landing so the Army children attended Coddington.

C: That's right. Fort Adams was an Army post.

W: Yes, it was an active post until 1950.

C: You lived in Newport for a short time before you went back to Washington, I believe, in 1926 and 1927. Why did your mother decide to return to D.C.?

W: Well, because my grandmother had not improved very much and her other children, mainly her older son, Mason Remey, was in Washington. They decided she should go to a nursing home down there. Mother decided that she'd take us down and live near her family as it was only three years after my father had died. The last year before I went to Washington, I went to a small school on the island here called Miss Weaver's; it was a day school, private school, for about twenty boys and from there I went into St. Alban's School in Washington for a year.

C: Right. Was it the following year, 1928, that you came back to Newport?

W: 1927

C: 1927, ok.



W: We were just one year in Washington.

C: Correct. Then you came back to Newport and enrolled in St. George's.

W: Well, I went one year to Miss Weaver's again because I was too young for St. George's and then I went out to St. George's as a day scholar for a year.

C: What grade were you in at that time?

W: Seventh grade. I went from the seventh grade in Miss Weavers, actually into what they called First Form in St. George's, which was also seventh grade. That was because of age actually. I spent six years at St. George's.

C: Were you a day student during that time?

W: Only one year. Then I boarded.

C: Was your mother in Newport during your years at St. George's?

W: Yes, she stayed on, so I wasn't very far away from home. She stayed on, but traveled some. My younger brother was going to public school and then to day school here, all during that period. He followed me out to St. George's the year I graduated there.

C: I see. Can you tell me something about the school during that time period? It has such a famous reputation of being a fine prep school. What



C: was the school curriculum like and what activities did you participate in? Was there anybody that attended school with you that you remember in particular for any reason?

W: St. George's was an excellent prep school. It was going to be difficult for mother to be able to send me there, and I was fortunate enough to get a part-time scholarship because of my father's service in World War I. The school was very nice about that. I was happy there. There were a lot more problems living with a whole lot of boys than living at home, but it was definitely good for me. I was not really an athlete, but athletics were required, and you lived by the book out there. Discipline was stiff. You wore coats, ties; you wore stiff collars in the evening. You wore a detachable collar that was a way they knew if you changed your shirt during the day, and we were treated basically as young gentlemen. It had much of the English school tradition and you said sir to the upper classmen.

The masters were well chosen; in those days we would get new masters just out of college. Normally they had a sports background as well as scholastic, so they could coach. The senior masters were old timers when I got there. It was a school tradition right on through. It was then only forty years old.

C: Did you have to take Latin and Greek?

W: I had to take Latin, no Greek. I took Latin the first four years. It was about that time I started getting interested and my mother was interested in having me go into the Navy.





C: Did you have any particular interest or any bent for the Navy yourself?

W: Oh, yes. I guess I was building ships and talking ships and interested in the naval organization and so on as early as I can remember. The family background, two grandfathers, helped this. I haven't mentioned going to see my Grandfather Wadleigh in Lexington, Massachusetts; he lived there and that was a big event always to go up and see him. I never knew him as well I knew my other grandfather. He was a little more austere and not as placid, but he loved to tell sea stories. He told me all about when he was with Farragut at Mobile Bay. He had a library that I loved delving through. So with that background, I was heading for the Navy.

At St. George's, when I went in, there were seven other day boys. All eight of us were navy juniors. They all automatically put down their college as Annapolis in the year book. I was the only one that ended up going there from those eight. I was the first one from St. George's to go to the Academy since World War I. It was primarily a preparatory school for Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Penn.

C: So you obviously took the regular curriculum?

W: My last three years they allowed modifications in that I took the same subjects, but I took them in a little different order so that by the time the entrance exams at the Naval Academy came up, which were before I finished my last year, I had had basically all the subjects the Academy required for entrance.

C: And were they more mathematical and scientific than classical?



W: Yes, they were. There were six entrance subjects; two history, one english, two math, and one science. For college boards, you could get by with a math and a science, english and a language, as I remember.

C: Did the school sponsor any social activities?

W: They had an annual school dance which the upper three forms could attend. The masters entertained in their homes to some extent. We all went to Sunday tea in the school library. The first social activity I remember was in my first year, the first formers had to carry tea around to guests. And Sunday evening the first form boarders were all invited up to Miss Diaman's room to be read to. Miss Diaman was the hostess of the school because the headmaster then was a bachelor, Mr. Nevins. Miss Diaman's brother had founded the school and she stayed on there my first year. The next headmaster had a wife. Mr. Vaughn Merrick came in with a new wife and baby. It's hard to realize that he was only 33 years old when he came in there. To me he seemed older than you know who.

C: I can imagine. Did you participate in any athletics? You mentioned you weren't particularly interested in athletics. What did they encourage you to do or ask you to do?

W: In the fall everybody played football. I think my mother made a mistake because I had a history of bronchial problems and she thought I shouldn't





W: play football, so I worked as manager on the team for the first four years. But it would have been probably better in retrospect to play. I might have ended up with something broken, but playing with all the other non-athletes, a lot of them were not really born football players. We had soccer later which I played and we had winter sports. We all had to do a little swimming. I played baseball in the spring and the last two years I was the tennis manager of the team and lived on the courts.

C: So it was a pleasant six years.

W: Yes, and I believe I was prepared in many ways for the Naval Academy better than a lot of my USNA classmates. I knew discipline, I was not surprised when I got to the Academy and had to live by rules and regulations. It wasn't a military life at St. George's, but we did things on the bell and the way they told us to.

C: Yes, there was discipline.

W: We had a student government too, with five prefects each year, you were called up before them if you "stubbed your toe" or did things wrong.

C: It seems a far cry from our situation today. Just to get back to Newport a little bit during your six years at St. George's, you mentioned your mother lived there and your grandfather was there, too. Your mother seemed to be a very gregarious, outgoing person with a lot of friends and connections. Can you speak to that, in this time period, in your youth up to eighteen?



W: Yes, we came back to Newport. I went to St. George's; my grandfather died in my first year there. Mother had no reason really to go back there, although her mother lived on for another ten years as an invalid most of the time in my uncle's house on Mass Avenue, NW. My mother had made good friends at the Wheeler School, and she made good friends in the service, and she made an effort to go out and keep track of those friends. She was an ardent letter writer, an ardent photographer. She loved music; she'd travel whenever possible. She took us on trips at Christmas as youngsters; I think probably because she didn't want to re-live Christmas at home when my father had been alive. So we made trips up until the time I went to the Academy. These were short trips, although once we went to Bermuda and once on a cruise out of New York on the STATENDAM for two weeks in the Caribbean. This was quite an experience for a boy fourteen years old.

C: Where did you go on the STATENDAM?

W: We went down to the Caribbean through the Bahamas. We went back to Haiti for a day, which mother wanted to show me and my brother. We went to Panama. It was the same type of cruise as they have now.

C: You were exposed to the world of travel, to a wider and broader perspective through this. When you finished St. George's you said you had a strong desire to go to the Naval Academy; I assume you were very enthusiastic about it. How did you obtain your appointment and from what state were you appointed?





W: I was enthusiastic about going to the Academy, but I wasn't as enthusiastic as my mother was to have me go. It was very easy to see all my classmates heading for college and say I'm going to miss these guys. But in 1930, I guess, mother started looking around, talking to her Navy friends here in Newport as to what was the best way for me to do it. She found that there was an appointment coming up in Rhode Island by Clarke Burdick, the Congressman from the Newport area, we actually had three Congressmen in the state then, one from down here. She had people writing to him and I was interviewed by several Senior Naval Officers including Harris Laning here at the War College, Captain Rowcliff of the Training Station and various other people. I even went to see Senator Pell's father, although he was a Democrat. Mother left no stones unturned. Burdick offered his appointment in a competitive exam in the fall of 1932 and I went down and took it at the Post Office here where the building stands now, a civil service examination. I was lucky. I had prepared for it the summer before and was coached in math.

C: Where did you do that, coaching in math?

W: Right in Jamestown. Mother found a recent graduate of the Academy who had resigned on graduating because of vision. I think she paid him fifty dollars a month or something. He came up and lived with us, sailed with me, and taught me math every morning, mostly going over the exams that we would face going into the Academy. He was a good teacher. The competitive exams down there were one day sessions, but I took six subjects. I got the appointment that way.





C: Oh, wonderful. I think you mentioned in the book that you wrote about your mother that you did some prep work in Annapolis.

W: Yes. Once I got the appointment I still had to pass the entrance exams to the Academy which were considerably more difficult. They were the same subjects. There was a period of three days there. St. George's let me off for six weeks to go down to what's known as a cram school. There was one in Annapolis called the Werntz School which had a good reputation. It was known as Werntz's "War College" at that time, but it stayed in business until after World War II. I had six weeks of cramming down there, taking all the subjects and going over and over exams.

C: I see.

W: Then I had some trouble catching up on some of the courses I'd missed at St. George's. In other words, I had done my work to get in the Academy. To graduate at St. George's I needed to get the subjects missed there while cramming. I caught up.

C: So you finished that, and you passed the Academy exams for entrance with flying colors. You graduated from St. George's in 1933, this was at the height of the depression. Do you remember anything in particular about the depression here in this area, the effects of it on Newport or Jamestown?

W: Not really. I do remember the Navy was pulled out of here the year before. As far as ships coming in the summer there were few because the fleet



W: was concentrated on the West Coast permanently. Very few ships came in the summer of 1932 and for the short time I was here in 1933. That in itself hurt Newport's summer economy because the sailors spent what money they had on shore. Most of them were unmarried. I don't remember too much else. I can dimly remember the stock market crash. When we would go to New York once in a while we'd see people selling apples and that type of thing but, I can't comment on what it did. In Newport it cut down on the force of the Torpedo Station.





Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the Naval War College

Interviewee: Rear Admiral John Wadleigh, USN (RET)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the Navy in Narragansett Bay

Date: May 30, 1985

C: This is the second oral history interview with Rear Admiral John Wadleigh. The interview is being conducted by Evelyn M. Cherpak, the curator of the Naval Historical Collection. It is being conducted in my office in Mahan Hall. Today's date is May 30, 1985.

Rear Admiral Wadleigh, I believe we left off talking about your entering the US Naval Academy. You spent four years there, from 1933 to 1937. I wonder if you can brief me on what Academy life was like for you; a little bit about the studies; social events; your plebe year, which is always kind of strenuous with the hazing; and anything else that you can remember that is noteworthy from that period of your life?

W: That's a big order. I entered the Academy pretty much on schedule, very little hoopla one way or the other. I had trouble with my teeth in passing the exam because of malocclusion. However, the senior dentist said: "Well, my jaw leans to starboard and yours leans to port," and gave me a waiver. After entering in the morning, I was sworn in at noon on June 20, I remember that day very well; therein started a new life for me.

I would like to say that St. George's school gave me a very good start in that I was used to the discipline and regulated life that lay before me for



W: four years at the Naval Academy. Many of my contemporaries who came in from public schools and day schools, had not had that preparation.

Plebe summer was three months of hot weather, drills, trying to learn how to keep step, meeting new people. My roommate and I just happened to join forces because he had come in on the same day and we remained for four years as roommates at Bancroft Hall.

C: Rear Admiral Wadleigh, can you tell me what his name was?

W: Yes. William Draper-Brinckloe, of Easton, Maryland, who retired as a Captain in the specialty of Engineering Duty. He was in the Navy until 1967 and we still keep close touch. I don't believe my life there was too different from thousands of others who went through in the thirties. I do remember that we entered at the time of the depression and our normal allowance, our pay, for a year was approximately six hundred dollars. We were allowed as plebes two dollars a month spending money, but Mr. Roosevelt, the President, had decreed in 1933 that all Government salaries would be docked fifteen percent, and accordingly our spending money was docked to 1.75 a month.

C: Did you pay for uniforms out of the six hundred dollars?

W: Yes. You paid for everything out of that six hundred dollars. I was fortunate enough that I did not have to draw an advance, some people drew in





W: order to pay travel expenses to get there and so on. But on the whole, except for money you might have received from home, that six hundred dollars is what you got for the year, and uniforms, books, certain expenses, and so on, hair cuts, and that sort of thing came out of that.

Plebe year went by very fast; I have many memories of it and occasionally I write them down because that was fifty one years ago at the present time. Fifty years ago I had just finished my third class or youngster year, sophomore year, in college and we were getting ready for our first summer at the Academy; we cruised in the 1934 summer abroad and we would cruise again in the 1936 summer.

C: Can you tell me what ships you cruised in during the three cruises that you took?

W: Actually, we made two battleship cruises. I cruised on the WYOMING (BB 32) my first year. She had been partly converted for a training ship. She had room for extra quarters, room for classrooms. Two years later I cruised on the OKLAHOMA (BB 37), which was an active battleship brought back from the Pacific to cruise midshipmen.

The Academy grew while I was there, our class entered four hundred and forty. We actually graduated four years later, three hundred and thirty which was a twenty five percent attrition. The following class entered about five hundred and sixty as I remember, and the class of 1939, which fifty years ago this summer we welcomed at the Academy when I was a Second Classmen, had almost seven hundred.





W: A lot of our duty during that 1935 summer had to do with drilling the new class coming in. Both cruises, luckily, took us to Europe. The summer of 1935, we were three months at the Academy as a class. During that period, we cruised twice for a week at a time in a destroyer. This was something new at the Academy. They sent us to sea, about one hundred on each of the old World War I destroyers. I cruised in destroyer number 93, the FAIRFAX, both times, a cruise in Chesapeake Bay and a cruise to Philadelphia.

C: These cruises then were practice cruises for the midshipmen.

W: Yes. The cruise itself had some classroom work, but mostly doing the job of the sailors aboard ship for your first cruise. Your second cruise, you did the job of junior officers. It was well integrated. Midshipmen had been cruising at sea since the Academy was first formed over ninety years before I went there and they were well organized. It was one of the most effective training parts of the Academy curriculum.

C: Was plebe year especially difficult for you? Was there much hazing at the Academy then?

W: The hazing all took place the first year. They never called it hazing, it was learning to be a good midshipmen and an effective junior officer. There was some physical hazing in that if you did something wrong you did so many pushups or so many chins. There was an occasional use of a broom or a paddle on your backside if you did something wrong. I never encountered any what I would call brutal, such as you have read about in times of the Academy,



W: particularly long before I was there. There had been several congressional investigations in earlier years on the subject of hazing, but you didn't relax very much except in the privacy of your own room in Bancroft Hall. You held yourself in a brace each time you walked down the center of the corridors, you called all upper classmen "Sir"; you had one first classman who was your mentor, a senior whom you reported to before every formation, and he would see if you were dressed properly. We ate our meals in the mess hall, most days sitting up straight on about two inches of the chair, taking your food in square corners to your mouth. Things like that that later came to be known as "chicken regulations." But in the long run, it was good for us.

C: You survived that year then quite well. Did you enjoy your studies there? Did you find them challenging?

W: I found my studies challenging and scary at times. There was a very tight grip put on making a passing grade and quite a lot of emphasis, and rightfully so, on how well you did, because when you graduated from the Academy your class standing put you in proper seniority standing for your first two years. After that it would vary only by what we now know as the selection process.

C: So you really had an incentive to do very well.

W: You had a strong incentive because there were exams each term, and if you did not pass a course, you came up before the Academic Board. In most cases, midshipmen left the Academy in the first year or year and a half. Sometimes





W: you were given re-exams to see if you could pass. Occasionally people were turned back. We lost one person plebe summer, which I think is interesting because he was a boy who just could not adjust. Today you hear of, in a class of a thousand, some fifty or sixty drop out in the initial months even before they come up for an examination. In our first cut, which was in January 1934, I think we lost probably thirty out of four hundred and forty. As I said, eventually we graduated three hundred and thirty out of four hundred forty which was an even twenty five percent.

C: Did you remember Admiral Colbert? I believe he was in the class of 37 also?

W: Dick Colbert and I were classmates, but we were in different battalions. In the four years I was there midshipmen did not rotate between battalions. There were four battalions and two companies in each battalion. We pretty well stuck in the same organization for the whole time. Dick Colbert was living in another side of Bancroft Hall than where I did. I do remember him, but our paths did not cross frequently and it was later on that I became a good friend of his.

C: Yes, he was the president of the Naval War College as we know. Did you participate in any athletics there?

W: I was not an athletically inclined midshipmen. Another thing that I found a challenge were the physical tests. We had strength tests for muscle



W: development; we had a swimming test; and we had certain athletic tests that you had to pass: running, jumping, chinning, rope climb and so on. Each year that kept me fairly busy and each year the tests required doing a little more.

I was with the baseball team for four years and ended up as manager of the team, which took care of all of my spring sports. There was every effort made to get people out to take athletics and generally speaking there were a very few who did not go into some sport.

C: Did the midshipmen have much of a social life? You always hear about June week and the ring dance as some of the most important events. Were there any other social events during the year other than those centered around graduation?

W: I would say that there was a fairly full social life. Your first year you were not allowed to "drag", which meant escorting girls to the Academy, except on one or two occasions. In my first year the only time we could go off the campus was on Saturday afternoon between noon and suppertime, town liberty as they called it, and, on Sundays we could accept invitations to lunch. After plebe year there began a social life in that there were hops or dances approximately once a month; there were the Masqueraders, the drama group of the Naval Academy, the Musical Clubs, and other evening entertainments to which people invited guests.

Boxing matches in the winter were very formal affairs in that you had to wear your full dress to be a spectator. Today imagine a prize fight arena





W: and people all dressed up in full dress and tuxedos, evening gowns, and so on, with nobody yelling or shouting as they do now. They were formal affairs. So I can say that there was quite a social life. We could not go away from Annapolis until our last year when we were allowed two weekends during the academic year when you could go over night.

Then June week, as you say, was the first time the new plebe really could formally take a girl to a hop, the June ball. I did not escort that first year. I can remember the minute the ball was over, it was hell night for the plebe because that was your last night before you became a third classman. I spent that night sleeping on the floor of my first classman's room to keep out of the way of other marauding upper classmen. Your first classman, interestingly, was also your protector, and to some extent he kept you out of trouble with the other upper classmen. For the next three years, June week was a gala event, particularly, of course, graduation year.

C: It was during your Academy days that you met your future wife, I believe. Can you tell me a little about her family? How did you meet her? Was her family military?

W: Yes, her family was Marine Corps. Actually the first time I met my future wife was when I was one year old and she was six months old. I don't remember that too well. When we were five years old, we were both in Quantico, Virginia, and after that I did not really see her until I was a First Class Midshipman. Once at the Academy I escorted her to a hop, I think I was a third classman on what we call a "duty drag". My mother had asked me to show





W: her around. And we had a nice time, but I didn't see her again for two years. Her father Colonel Seth Williams was in Philadelphia then, in command of the Marine Corps Quartermaster Depot Command, but he came to Washington in 1936 as Assistant Quartermaster of the Marine Corps and became Quartermaster during that year and was promoted to Brigadier General. Washington was very convenient to Annapolis and Ray started coming down that fall for football games. During 1937 she came down quite frequently; we were engaged shortly after I graduated.

C: Oh, I see.

W: She came to first class June week with me.

C: You graduated in 1937, and you had your first ship assignment shortly after that on the USS TEXAS, with Fred Rogers as the CO. He has connections with Newport, too. Can you tell me anything about that first assignment on the Texas and about Captain Rogers?

W: Yes, a little background. One of the big things before you graduate, two months before, three months before, is first ship assignments. We all put in our requests, with one, two, three, priorities. By that time I was well enamored with my future wife and I thought an East Coast ship would be a very interesting assignment and it would also be a new ship. All of the new ships in 1937 were being built on the East Coast. I put in for a new cruiser and was assigned to the cruiser BROOKLYN. It was being built in the New York Navy yard and would commission, I thought, about the time I would graduate. Actually, it was four months later and so in the interim I was assigned to the battleship TEXAS.



W: TEXAS was one of the older battleships of the Navy and was in the Training Squadron. Eight of us, new ensigns, went to that ship on the first of July 1937. Captain Fred Rogers, was in command; I can't say that I knew him, but my mother knew the family quite well, and he had been up here in Newport. I was there two months as a junior officer, much like being a plebe midshipmen in someways on your first ship.

We cruised that summer. I reported ahead in Norfolk, and we went north to Annapolis where we picked up naval reserves, about six hundred, cruising them for two weeks. TEXAS made three of those cruises during the summer. The ship was training reserves and I was really just learning my way as a junior division officer on Captain Roger's ship and standing junior deck watches. She was a good ship, she had a fine spirit and the seven others and myself as young ensigns had a good time. However, we knew our stay was going to be short because our cruisers, the PHILADELPHIA and BROOKLYN, were commissioning in early fall.

C: So you were assigned a position in the USS BROOKLYN.

W: I went to the BROOKLYN a month before she commissioned. Four of us reported in New York Navy Yard from the TEXAS as part of the commissioning crew. That was an interesting assignment.

C: What did that entail?

W: BROOKLYN had a set of offices in a building at the Navy Yard. Our Executive Officer was Commander Lawrence DuBose who later became a





W: four star admiral, a very famous, fine gentlemen. We didn't think he was so fine at that time. Executive Officers are rarely loved by the junior officers. He was whipping us into shape. All four of us took a long Labor Day leave without asking his permission. We actually had not checked into the office, and we all arrived late. To him, we were four days over leave, all four of his new ensigns, an inauspicious beginning.

C: Were you penalized for that?

W: We were not penalized, although I think DuBose might have. However, the Captain of the Yard was normally our skipper until the ship commissioned and he let us off. That was Jonas Ingrham, who was also a famous officer. He was a rather jovial and relaxed gentlemen, and he said "Oh, these are just kids, just keep them working." So there was no permanent penalty, but I am glad I didn't have to live through the Navy on the basis of that first fitness report.

C: You were obviously at the commissioning ceremony.

W: Yes, I was at the commissioning. The commissioning officer was Rear Admiral Harris Laning, who had been President of the War College here and was Commandant in New York of the Third Naval District and of the Navy Yard at that time. We commissioned on September 30th of 1937. My first captain was Captain William Brereton who had three lovely daughters; I remember that they were going out with junior lieutenants at that time, not worrying about ensigns.

C: You were in the BROOKLYN for several years.



W: I had three years, almost three years, and she was a fine ship. It took us a while to get to the fleet after commissioning and the shake down process; we really were late joining the Battle Force.

At that time, the fleet was on the West Coast. We were due out there in 1938; we actually didn't get out there until 1939.

C: I remember reading in the account of your mother's life that the BROOKLYN was one of the ships that was open to the public during the 1939 World's Fair. That was kind of interesting, I thought.

W: That was interesting. Actually, we didn't join the Fleet on the West Coast. We first joined up right after New Years in 1939. There was a group of new carriers, cruisers, and destroyers that had been built on the East Coast and joined in a group under Admiral Bull Halsey, who was a brand new admiral at the time, meeting the fleet off the Panama Canal. The whole Fleet then spent the winter in the Caribbean and came north. History books show that the whole Fleet was going to go to New York for the World's Fair opening. About ten days ahead of time the Fleet got orders to suddenly return to the West Coast and cancel the New York visit. It was almost six months before World War II broke out in Europe. There were things going on and Roosevelt himself, as President, made the decision to send the Fleet back to the West Coast and get them through the canal. Our division, which still had a couple of jobs in the Navy yard to be done, and a few other ships remained. We represented the Fleet in New York for that period of ten days in the North River. It put the social onus on us because New York had so much laid on for the whole Fleet and less than a fifth of it was there.





C: I also remember from my reading that the BROOKLYN went to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for a couple of weeks after the sinking of the USS SQUALUS. That ship was sunk in trials. What was it doing there? Where were you reconnoitering?

W: We were in New York and we had, as I remember, two more days in the Navy yard and then we were going to go to Norfolk to join our Division Commander, in the PHILADELPHIA with two other ships and head west. The word came that the SQUALUS had sunk and the Captain got a telephone call from the Navy Department asking when could we be ready for sea. We then had a new Captain who had just come aboard, Captain W.W. Smith, known as "Poke" in the Navy, later a famous World War II Officer. Captain Smith said: "We can be ready in three hours," or something like that. We gathered up our crew in a hurry, anticipating going west. The Executive Officer had been quite liberal on liberty and the recall went out over the radio.

What they wanted the BROOKLYN to do was take up as much salvage gear that was available in New York plus thirty divers who came up by train from Washington. When they got on BROOKLYN she sailed late that afternoon and made a fairly high speed run. We got to Portsmouth the next morning and met the rescue ship FALCON, that had located the SQUALUS. We brought gear and also had a large crowd of press people who came with us. There was almost a riot on the dock, and our duty watch finally had to close the gangway. We could only take so many and every newsman had a reason for going.

We got most of our crew back, we had about four hundred ashore, when the word was put out on local radio. I think all but ninety of them came back. Then the rest came up by train the next day. We were in Portsmouth for





W: about ten days acting as a station ship, headquarters, and communications center. We had nothing to do with the diving operations.

C: That was a interesting interlude before you went out to the West Coast. But before you went out on the BROOKLYN, you were married in June of 1939. Can you tell me where you were married and events surrounding that?

W: In 1939 ensigns were allowed to get married two years after graduation; my wife and I had been engaged for almost two years. Early in 1939, we had made our plans and we hoped that we would be allowed to be married before the Fleet went west, which would have been in May. I put in a special permission slip which was denied. So then we made plans to be married in the middle of June on the West Coast. Then off Portsmouth Captain Smith said: "We are going to be around here for ten days." He happened to know my family, both sides, and he said: "Do you think if you got married over here you would save some money and trouble and so on?" So I called my wife on Sunday and said: "Can you get married next Saturday?" It actually worked out very well. It was quite sudden and we had a small wedding at the National Cathedral in the Armed Forces Chapel there on Saturday, June 3. When the Brooklyn sailed, I joined the Cruiser at Norfolk. The skipper let me off at Portsmouth and I went down the Sunday beforehand and we got married the next Saturday. The BROOKLYN sailed on Monday for the West Coast.

He said: "I would let you join us on the West Coast but you have to qualify in engineering." Every ensign had to be fully qualified in engineering, operations, and communications. I was qualified but I hadn't stood enough engineering watches. During the last month they pulled me



W: back out of gunnery so I could get my watch standing, which I did on the trip around.

C: But you had to join your ship on Monday?

W: Yes. I came back Monday. Everyone said: "Oh, you had a fine honeymoon didn't you?" We were off that afternoon to sea.

C: How did your wife proceed west?

W: She went back up to Washington and stayed with her parents, and then came west. I met her on the West Coast in Los Angeles.

C: Where was your ship? Where was it homeported?

W: We were based in Long Beach. The battleships were all in Long Beach and the cruisers, split between San Diego and Long Beach.

C: So you were with the BROOKLYN for a good three years.

W: I had been there almost two years when we were married.

C: Right.

W: We went to the West Coast and after two weeks the Fleet went north from Long Beach. We went to the San Francisco World's Fair and opened that, which was very nice. My wife was able to follow me; most of the wives didn't





W: follow like they do now. We were fancy free with no children or anything. She came up and then we went to Portland for the Rose Festival and then back to Long Beach. Then there was a week at sea and a week at port; it was pretty regular operations.

C: For the following year, for that last year?

W: We went to Bremerton at the end of September for a three-month overhaul, which was nice. We were up there for three months, that was really our honeymoon because the ship was in port for the whole three months. I had the duty aboard ship every fourth night. We were able to get a little leave and go to Canada for a few days; I had never seen that. BROOKLYN came south the first of January 1940 and was with the fleet. I was aboard until the end of that summer of 1940 and then I was transferred to the carrier YORKTOWN.

C: Right, that's what I was planning to get into next, your transfer, your assignment to the YORKTOWN. That was based in Hawaii.

W: Yes. By that time the whole fleet had gone to Hawaii and ships were only coming home occasionally, that was the time when there was much controversy whether the Navy could keep the fleet in full readiness in Hawaii or whether it was better to have it in California waters. Admiral Richardson, CICUS, was eventually replaced with Admiral Kimmel primarily because of his disagreement with the President on that. I was transferred in August 1940 and I went aboard YORKTOWN as I just made my promotion to Junior Grade Lieutenant.

C: And what was your position on the ship? What was your job assignment?



W: I reported to the YORKTOWN with Commander Arthur Radford as the Executive Officer at the time. He put me into the job of Ship's Secretary and Signal Officer in the Communications Department. I was about six months in that job and then became a Division Officer and Deck Watch Officer. She was a fine ship. It was a very broadening experience, although I thought at the time I should be going to a destroyer.

C: This is going to prove exciting as the war breaks out in 1941. Where were you on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was struck?

W: When I joined the YORKTOWN in 1940 we were out there; then we were summarily sent to the Atlantic in April 1941. My wife left me at the dock at Pearl Harbor on a Sunday morning because the Fleet was going out. The next time I saw her was two months later, because we went under sealed orders to the Panama Canal and ended up in Bermuda. We operated in the Atlantic from May until December 1941, based in Norfolk. In October and November we operated out of Casco Bay, Maine.

On December 7th the YORKTOWN had come back to Norfolk and we were getting ready to go into the Portsmouth Shipyard, Virginia, for two months of overhaul work and modernization. I was actually ashore that Sunday. My wife and I were seeing a movie called "H.M. Pullman Esquire," which was a John B. Marguand movie, and someone came out to announce the Pearl Harbor attack. When we went out, we saw the headline in the paper. I called the ship and I was told to be aboard first thing in the morning; I knew they could not do much to get her out because all our planes were on the beach. We loaded our air group twice, and took it off twice; no one could decide exactly what the





W: next step was. Then we went into the yard for five days of quick repair and then headed for the West Coast.

C: I see. So the long overhaul obviously was postponed. Were things chaotic? Do you remember the reaction, the public reaction, and also the reaction within the military to these events?

W: The reaction was shock. By that time Commander Radford had been relieved by Commander "Jocko" Clark, who had been Executive for about six months when Pearl Harbor was hit. He wasn't too much with administrative details but he had fighting spirit. No one knew exactly what was to happen. Within four days, as I remember, three different directives came as to exactly what was going to happen. They knew they wanted to get some extra gear on us but they weren't sure whether they had the escorts to send us west. I don't know what was going on at the top level. There was confusion undoubtedly. In Norfolk it was best, if you were Filipino, to stay off the streets. Because anybody who was Asiatic might get taken on by bystanders.

C: I guess feelings ran high.

W: Yes, feelings ran high. YORKTOWN was used to wartime operations; we had been doing them for almost five months in the Atlantic patrols and convoys. What we had found, suddenly, was we had another three hundred men aboard ship. Men were sent aboard to flush our crew out to wartime complement. Most of these fellows had been in the Norfolk Training Stations in all as much as maybe three weeks or four weeks. We were a training ship for awhile; our first job was to get them worked into the ship's crew.





C: Did you proceed then to Pearl Harbor?

W: No, we went to San Diego with some more reorganization of our air group. I had the watch New Year's Eve in San Diego. I remember the rumors were that the Germans had some planes in Mexico that would come over and hit us. Nothing happened actually. My wife was able to come out for three days in San Diego before we sailed. Then we escorted a convoy with the Eighth Marine Regiment embarked to Samoa. We reinforced the island and then made the first strike on the Gilbert and Marshall Islands as part of Admiral Halsey's force of two carriers. We ended up in Pearl Harbor in early February.

C: Of 1942. So you did see action immediately, almost immediately.

W: In our strike out there we saw one Jap shot down, but we weren't actually attacked. We lost a couple of planes in the raid.

C: And then you retreated to Pearl Harbor?

W: We went back to Pearl Harbor; we were there for about two weeks and then went down to the South Pacific for the Battle of the Coral Sea.

C: Yes, I remember reading about that. You participated in both Coral Sea and Midway in 1942. Can you tell me anything about the action at Coral Sea, your first battle in May of 1942, the real big one that you were involved in? You mentioned that the YORKTOWN was hit.

W: We had not been under enemy fire until then. We felt we had a really good air group. We had a pretty well knit gunnery department and so on. I was the



W: 5-inch director officer aft. We had two directors for our five-inch, gun battery. I was "sky aft," as they call it, and I also stood deck watches, one in five.

Our captain, Elliot Buckmaster, had grown up in the surface fleet as a destroyer officer and took his wings as a commander Pensacola in 1936. But he was a superb ship handler, maneuvering our ship like a destroyer. In the Battle of the Coral Sea, when we were attacked by Japanese Air Groups, he proved this. In the battle our air group was attacking the Japanese while we were being attacked. Buckmaster handled the YORKTOWN in a superb fashion. We took one hit. The other ship, in our formation, the carrier LEXINGTON, was actually hit several times. She didn't handle as easily as the YORKTOWN. She was a bigger ship and slower moving, and she was lost.

I am very thankful to be alive, because when YORKTOWN was hit, the bomb passed very close to my director. It was armor piercing and went right through the deck below and did not burst. It burst down into the ship and exploded where it killed a lot of people.

C: I was going to say, you would have had casualties there.

W: Yes. If it had hit the deck, I think probably most in the director would have been caught by the blast.

C: It did have one severe hit there. But it was in the next battle, the Battle of Midway in June of 1942, that the YORKTOWN eventually sunk and you escaped. Can you tell me about that?





W: Well, after the Coral Sea, the YORKTOWN retreated. The LEXINGTON was sunk, and the YORKTOWN with escort ships fell back on Tongatabu, in the Tonga Islands. It was probably our safest anchorage. We had to assess our own damage. We fueled there and suddenly got orders to proceed to Pearl Harbor; we knew we would go there for drydocking and a looksee. We started north with the rest of our force and then the rumors started flying that there was something big on. The other two carriers, ENTERPRISE and HORNET, in the Pacific literally put themselves between us and any Jap force. The HORNET and the ENTERPRISE were moving north of us with Admiral Halsey. Shortly, everybody headed back to Pearl Harbor; we were in there four days thinking we were going back to Bremerton, because we were structurally quite badly damaged. Instead, yardworkers swarmed aboard for extra work. We got in May 27, 1942. The yard put us in drydock at Pearl Harbor.

Admiral Nimitz came down and said hello. Next thing we knew, instead of heading for Bremerton, we were heading back to join the two undamaged carriers, the HORNET and the ENTERPRISE. We caught them two days before Midway to the north of Midway. We did not have a clear idea, at my level at least, as to what exactly was happening. We knew that we had another carrier action and so on but did not know what the exact scope of it was. But I remember the captain telling us that as soon as this one was over we were heading for Bremerton for a good repair job and so on and we could all get some leave and that sort of thing.

C: Building morale probably.

W: By this time we had a third Executive Officer. Commander Clark had made captain and departed right after the Gilbert Operation in early February. A



W: very fine gentlemen, Commander Dixie Keefer came aboard as Executive and was the opposite of Clark as far as knowing people and the ship, but I doubt if he was any better a fighting man. He was a very calm Executive Officer and he really led the crew, morale-wise. He was the best of all three Executives that I served under on that ship. He handled things down below and the captain handled the conning and air operations topside.

We went into the Midway battle pretty confident, at least confident at my level. Before we saw Jap planes, we had already gotten the word that the Japs had been pretty severely hit; we knew that there were still some Japs, and this last Jap raid came in and hit us twice with bombs which slowed us down. In fact, we were slowed to the point that the admiral that we had aboard left us to go to a cruiser. Shortly our engineers were able to work up to speed again. We were starting to take aboard some of our aircraft. Others had flown over to the other two carriers that were undamaged, the HORNET and the ENTERPRISE.

Then a last minute Jap strike came in while American planes were hitting that fourth Jap carrier. Their torpedo planes came in on us, striking us. We did not have the steam or agility that we had had at Coral Sea; we were more sluggish and handled more slowly. We took two torpedoes and the ship assumed a very fast list. In retrospect, if we had known then what we know now, the ship might have been saved. She did not sink immediately, only after the captain ordered abandon ship.

C: Did you have to just jump off?

W: Well, there were lines and very few boats; we got some of our rafts in the water. We had a lot of life rafts. We had a good destroyer screen. The





W: destroyers had stayed with us; other ships came over with the undamaged carriers because they still weren't certain what the status of the Japs were, and I was in the water for I guess an hour and a half.

C: Were you hanging on to anything or swimming towards anything?

W: I was swimming most of the time. I was able to keep a hand on the life raft. I did not have a life jacket on; we didn't all get life jackets. I was able to hang on. At least once the destroyers coming in to pick us up moved off because another air raid was forming.

C: That must have been terrifying.

W: Well, I wasn't sure what was going on; I just tried to keep kicking and so on.

C: Oh, I'm sure. You were trying to save yourself.

W: One destroyer slowed down and I saw a line off her bow and I started pushing myself away; I didn't have a good hold on the raft. I got hauled aboard this destroyer just as she backed off again for an air raid, but they hauled me in.

C: You managed to get hold of the line then.

W: Yes, someone up above hauled me up. My rope climbing was something that I had trouble with in the Academy. That destroyer turned out to be the RUSSELL





W: (DD 414). I guess by the time she picked me up she probably had three to four hundred of our crew aboard.

C: I was going to ask you how many were saved in total and how many died?

W: Very few died, except those that were hit in the bomb blast, in the actual attack. We got practically everybody off. We had four hundred, and I think another destroyer had six or seven hundred. We had about twenty-five hundred people or three thousand aboard; I think we lost about fifty or sixty. We were aboard the RUSSELL overnight. I found a friend aboard whom I knew slightly, and whose wife I'd known in Newport years before. Le Roy Taylor, was two classes ahead of me, and I had known Floride as a child up here. Le Roy, who was gunnery officer in RUSSELL, gave me a pair of trousers and said: "Use my bunk," which I used for awhile just to get out of the way. The RUSSELL had little extra material. I didn't have any shoes or anything like that; I did have the pair of trousers that he had given me.

The next day word was out that the YORKTOWN was still afloat; there was a US destroyer with her. Our captain, who was on another destroyer, picked out a party to go back aboard as the salvage party. He took mostly his damage control personnel. I did not go back on that. He took about a hundred men, senior petty officers, and key damage control officers, and heads of the departments. They went back and got aboard. But most of us stayed on the RUSSELL and other ships. They had been aboard, as I remember, approximately six or eight hours and a Jap submarine hit the YORKTOWN on the otherside; they were just about to get some power on the ship and start the ships engines.



W: By that time one tug had arrived and had her under tow.

C: So she was stablized at that point.

W: Yes, she was stablized. Then this torpedo hit from the otherside, and then she went lower in the water. The Japs also got our destroyer along side giving her some power. That destroyer, HAMMANN is (DD 410), - depth charges went off. The HAMMANN sank and her depth charges further damaged the YORKTOWN and blew a lot of people off the carrier. The YORKTOWN was finally abandoned for a second time.

In the meantime, most of the survivors had been transferred to the Cruiser PORTLAND. From Pearl Harbor, they sent out the brand new submarine tender, FULTON (AS 11), still down in the New London area today, one of our oldest ships in commission. She came out, arriving the second day; I transferred from the RUSSELL over to her. She took all the survivors aboard. When all the people were sorted out, I guess the total loss was one hundred and fifty of the ships company. They took us back to Pearl Harbor and put us in nearby Camp Catlin, which was empty of marines at that time. We were there for about three weeks.

C: Resting and recuperating?

W: Well, resting. The immediate reaction was what Captain Buckmaster said: "I'm going to take this crew back and we are going to bring out a new YORKTOWN." At that time there were about eight carriers being built on the





W: east coast here. We were all fired up to go back and come out again, but it never happened, because authorities in Pearl Harbor saw all these men, officers and enlisted, and they started grabbing us off to fill vacancies in the Fleet. That is probably how it should have been. You can't run the personnel from Washington to suit people in the Pacific war zone. Different people went to help with the salvage of the battleships that was still going on. I still expected to go back. I had been able to get in touch with my wife and was expecting to go back and get a new ship and come back to the war.

C: But you were assigned to Admiral Tisdale's staff.

W: After I had been there for about ten days, I was suspicious because I saw people disappearing. The captain went back; he didn't get another command. The Executive Officer stayed with us for a while and he was ordered back to put a new ship in commission. Well, I thought, we're not all going back as a group, that's for certain. And the next thing I knew, I had a set of orders. It was just to report to the fleet headquarters at Pearl Harbor. I said: "Well, they will let me have a little leave anyway." I went right to Admiral Tisdale's staff. I spent about ten days waiting for him and reported on July 4, 1942.

C: That was in Task Force 16, wasn't it?

W: Yes, actually that was a very fine cruise with him.

C: You were in the South Pacific then.



W: Yes. We had gone back to the South Pacific. The task force was built around the carrier ENTERPRISE which was the YORKTOWN'S sister ship. I was assigned as Flag Lieutenant to Admiral Tisdale who commanded cruisers, Task Force 16. He was a very fine gentleman; last time he'd seen me at the Naval Academy, he said that I could not keep a step. He really could remember my class because he was our Battalion Officer when we all came in. He had a facility for remembering names. Well, I said: "When he sees me he won't want me as an aide. I will be coming home anyway."

C: But it worked out well.

W: Yes, the Admiral brought an aide out with him from the Academy; he had just come from being Commandant of Midshipmen, just been promoted. He brought a Lieutenant Commander with him, with his loops on and everything. I said: "Oh boy, now I can go home," but instead the officer who had been assigned as his Flag Secretary and also had been in the YORKTOWN went home and I stayed. The officer who went home came out six months later and was killed off Guadalcanal on a destroyer. It was no good to figure in advance or try to plan things.

C: You were in the battle of Guadalcanal on a cruiser, weren't you?

W: I was in the invasion there. I was in the cruiser PORTLAND which had been with the YORKTOWN earlier. We were getting to be a very close community of ships there because the new ones hadn't really started coming out and the old ones were getting damaged or lost. We were in the invasion as part of the Carrier force. Our first action was the battle of the Eastern Solomons in which the PORTLAND was not damaged. I watched the Jap aircraft attacking





W: the ENTERPRISE and figured, well, I'm lucky not to be on the target this time.

C: That was November of 1942.

W: Well, no, the Eastern Solomons was in August. The ENTERPRISE was hit there and we went back to Pearl Harbor for about a month in port. I then saw my younger brother for the first time in a long time. He was an ensign and had just graduated from Harvard. He was in the destroyer REID and was on his way down to the South Pacific. I didn't see him again for sometime. I went over to see his ship and found a classmate of mine who was Executive Officer. They didn't have enough bunks for all the officers; ensigns slept on the hot bunk system. In other words, ensigns rotated, one of them was on watch, two others were off; they rotated around that way.

C: They had to conserve space.

W: We went down back to the Solomons again and I was in the battles of Santa Cruz, Guadalcanal, and Tassa faronga.

C: That was November 1942, that was what I was referring to before. You were still on Admiral Tisdale's staff in his flagship.

W: Yes. In early 1943 he got his orders. He was ordered back to be the Commander of the destroyers and cruisers in the Pacific with headquarters at Pearl, primarily an administrative job. As his personal aide, I thought I





W: should go back too. He was willing to take me back; I had been out for sixteen months. I said I would like to go to a new ship; I didn't really want to go to Pearl Harbor and be a Flag Lieutenant there for very long. He realized that, but he sent me back to post-graduate school for communications for a year.

C: Oh, that was in Annapolis then. Did you have any choice in the matter?

W: No, I had already put in a chit to go to that school. When the vacancy came up, I thought I better get some post-graduate training. I had had some communication duty and liked it. It was a short course; it wasn't a two or three year course where you go for master's degree.

C: How long was the course?

W: Well, actually a year.

C: A year course. So you had some chance for a family life during that time period.

W: We had quarters there in Annapolis. After about three months living in town, quarters opened up. It was fairly tough academically. I stayed on for two semesters as an assistant instructor. I eventually went back out in 1944.

C: Were you anxious to go back to sea?



W: Yes. I was so hoping to go back on a new ship, but Admiral Tisdale hadn't forgotten me. I went back out to be his Communications Officer. However, by that time he had departed, so I was on that staff in Pearl Harbor for ten months. I was always saying I have to get out on that ship again; finally I got sent out in 1945 at the end of the war.

C: Now what ship were you on in 1945?

W: GUAM. I went out on the Cruiser GUAM as the Operations Officer for the Division Commander. We thought we were going out in the invasion of Japan, but that fell apart. I saw some action out there in China Sea and the occupation of Korea and came back to the states for Christmas of 1945.

C: Where were you on V.J. Day?

W: We were in Okinawa. I don't remember the actual V.J. Day. I remember several times we thought things were calming down and then some Japs, one lone plane would come down and heckle us at night. The Battleship PENNSYLVANIA berthed next to us got hit one night with a torpedo just about V.J. Day and after that we gathered up all the big ships and went go to sea at night and came back in the daytime.

C: You obviously had no indication that the bombs were going to be dropped.

W: We didn't know anything about the bombs, but after the first one went off I think we pretty well figured the war was coming to a close.





C: It was during this wartime period that the two ships, the USS WADLEIGH and the USS REMEY, were launched in New Hampshire; this was back in 1943. Were you at any of these events?

W: Yes.



Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the Naval War College

Interviewee: Rear Admiral John Wadleigh, USN (RET)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the Navy in Narragansett Bay

Date: June 6, 1985

C: This is the third oral history session with Rear Admiral John Wadleigh. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection. Today's date is Thursday, June 6, 1985. The interview is being conducted in my office in Mahan Hall.

Rear Admiral Wadleigh, I believe we were finishing up with your service in World War II during the last tape and I was going to ask you about the launching of the USS REMEY and the USS WADLEIGH that took place during World War II. Did you attend the launching of either of the two ships named after your grandfathers?

W: Yes. I was a student at the post-graduate school in Annapolis at the time these ships were launched. We had a one-week break at the time the REMEY was launched, (DD 688) and my wife and I went to Portland, Maine, and met with members of the Remey family, including my mother and my aunt, Angelica Remey, the sponsor. We attended the launching of that ship. It was a standard launching ceremony; Bath Iron Works produced about one destroyer every two weeks during the war. The ceremony consisted of a gathering of the launching party; they had the Bath High School band playing outside, spectators invited, and the ship's sliding down the waves, as I remember, about eleven o'clock. This was followed by a luncheon at a Country Club, about three miles from the



W: shipyard. Bath, one of the best destroyer yards, I would say the best destroyer yard in the United States, turned out fine ships and both REMEY and her successor, two weeks later, the WADLEIGH turned out to be excellent and reliable ships. My aunt Angelica sponsored the ship; she hit the bottle of champagne on the bow with zest and was presented afterwards with a pin by the shipyard and what was left of the bottle and a small case which now resides in our house.

I did not attend the WADLEIGH launching, which was two weeks later and I was back in school. My younger brother, then an ensign on board the USS REID in the Pacific, came back and was assigned to the WADLEIGH's commissioning crew, joining her at the time of her commissioning in December, 1943.

C: So, there were two ships named after your illustrious relatives who were naval officers, admirals in the Navy. I would like to focus a little bit on your knowledge of Admiral Spruance and Admiral Nimitz during World War II. Did you ever see them? Did you ever have any contact with them during this time period, even in a remote way? And if you did, can you tell me your impressions of these men as officers and leaders?

W: I'd known Admiral Spruance as a youngster in Newport when he was a Commander and later Captain at the War College. His son, Edward, and I were Naval Academy classmates. He and Mrs. Spruance were good friends of my mother's. I saw him during the war, really only in Pearl Harbor in 1942 and early 1943 when he was Chief of Staff to Admiral Nimitz. This was between his combat in Midway and his promotion to vice admiral and his taking over the Central Pacific Force in 1943. I was told at one time that I was on the list to become his flag lieutenant in his command in the Central Pacific. Having been





W: out for over a year in January 1943, I went home for reassignment and was not pulled back to be his aide. A quiet man, he did a brilliant job at Midway, taking over on short notice. Well-liked, taciturn, I remember seeing him taking one of his walks; he spoke to me as he'd known me earlier. In fact, when he was Captain of the MISSISSIPPI, he and Mrs. Spruance were in Bremerton when my wife and I were there; we dutifully paid our call on them and enjoyed the hospitality of their house.

Admiral Nimitz lived in Makalapa, where in 1944-45 I resided while on the staff of Commander Cruiser's Destroyers there. Our actual headquarters were in Pearl City across Pearl Harbor, but we lived in Makalapa, commuting over and back each day. I frequently remember seeing Admiral Nimitz but never personally talking with him. He resided there; he used to go to the movies on occasion. I would go into his headquarters on business, but I never really had personal contact with him at that time. He had a well-organized and hard-working staff. It is great to read the stories of him and the biographies of both these illustrious officers and feel that you have had a bit in the various activities and knowing many of their staff as I did. But I can't say that I really, personally had contact with Admiral Nimitz.

C: Well, he was highly thought of, I'm sure, by the officers.

W: Oh, yes. I arrived in 1944 shortly after the famous Nimitz-McArthur-Roosevelt meeting. I'm sure if I had been there, I'd have been among the crowd of people when the cruiser BALTIMORE came in with President Roosevelt aboard. That conference set up the 1944-45 strategy in the Pacific.



C: I believe we finished discussing the final days of the war when you were on the USS GUAM in the waning days of the war in the Pacific. When did you return home after V.J. Day?

W: On V.J. Day, the GUAM, with Admiral Low and his staff, was in Okinawa. We were assigned the task of covering or protecting the occupation forces for Korea which were coming up from the Philippines - really part of the Seventh Fleet which had been operating in New Guinea and the Philippine area. We stayed there until late November in that task; that included going up into the China Sea right after V.J. Day and showing the flag along the Chinese Coast, leading the amphibious force into Inchon Harbor for the actual occupation, and being in Inchon for about six weeks. It was a rather busy task as ships were coming and going, and the U.S. 24th Corps came ashore in Inchon, fanning out to disarm the Japanese and take over South Korea.

It was about that time that the famous thirty-eighth parallel was set up because the Russians came in from the north. We went by Darien, where the Russians had already arrived, and the hospital ship RELIEF came up and under our screening, with our ships offshore, went into the Russian held port and took on a shipload of prisoners of war brought down by the Japanese.

The difficulties of that period were keeping crews together because men had discharge points; they were starting homeward. There were ships always going homeward; very few would bring out any replacements. We came home in mid-November and ended up in San Francisco in early December, and I was given leave and came home and met the GUAM after Christmas in New York.

C: Oh, so you came home to Newport.





W: I came home and met my wife in Washington and we went down to Beaufort, South Carolina, where her parents were, spending Christmas there. I reported back to the ship, knowing I knew I was going to get orders because our cruiser division was due for decommissioning. I wasn't sure where I was going, but in early 1946. I reported to the battleship NORTH CAROLINA in New York as the Gunnery Officer.

C: How long was your duty in the NORTH CAROLINA?

W: I was aboard her a year and a half. She was fully active at first, then as the fleet was compressed further than the Navy had planned, the NORTH CAROLINA went into a training status and in the last six months we decommissioned her in New York.

C: And you were the preservation officer?

W: I was the gunnery officer and then became in addition the preservation officer.

C: Right, preparing the ship to be decommissioned. I read that the ship was used to take midshipmen on cruises.

W: The summer of 1946, we cruised midshipmen, one of my most interesting and difficult jobs. We had a relatively new crew; in fact, very few of the crew from war time. NORTH CAROLINA was a fine battleship, but we operated her with about one quarter of her men we did in war time. We made two cruises with Naval Academy classes of 1947 and 1949 aboard, six week cruises each. It was



W: very interesting. I fired more practices and saw more actual gun fire than in any war time action. We had a lot of ammunition and there was no restriction as to how much shooting for training we could do.

C: You spent a year and a half in the NORTH CAROLINA and then, I believe, you were sent to the Armed Forces Staff College in Virginia for a period of time. What kind of a course were you enrolled in there and what were you being prepared for specifically?

W: The Armed Forces Staff College was set up by the Department of Defense in conjunction with the National War College as a junior joint service college to teach strategy, tactics, and staff work to officers of the Lieutenant Colonel, Commander, Major, Lieutenant Commander, and pertinent ranks. I was in the second class when the college convened. There were about 50 from each service in there, 150 students; it was a most enjoyable and challenging experience in many ways. All the army officers, for instance, were graduates of Leavenworth's Command and General Staff school. Most of the Navy had been to no post-graduate training. We learned a lot; we made a lot of friends. Probably the biggest benefit was in meeting officers from the other services, officers who, in many cases, I would see later through the years.

C: How long was the course?

W: The course was five months, twenty academic weeks plus a week of indoctrination. We took several field trips; everything was done jointly. There were quarters for most of the officers right on the post, but not having any children at the time, we were told to seek quarter's somewhere else in





W: Norfolk. I think we missed a little bit by not living in the compound, as they call it. But since it was filled with screaming youngsters, maybe we didn't miss that much.

C: Well, after the Armed Forces Staff College, you came back to Newport, RI, again.

W: Having had a communications course, I was, what they call now in the bureau, "P coded" for a sub-specialty and I could count on, having been at sea, my shore duty would probably be in communications. I don't remember specifically asking for Newport, but there was a vacant billet up here in General Line School for an instructor in communications. I had no argument with the detail officer who assigned me here. I was here about two and a half years and taught three different General Line School classes.

C: Oh, I see. And you also had your first home in Melville.

W: Melville had been the motor torpedo boat base during the war and in 1947-48, when I reported here, it had been deactivated to a fuel and net depot, and there were extra quarters up there. We came in at a poor time for finding housing, in the middle of the year. Admiral Cooley who commanded the base here had been our Division Commander when I was in NORTH CAROLINA. He offered a set of quarters at Melville which we didn't even look at but accepted. It turned out to be an old, little farm house that had been the Dental Clinic during the war. We were very comfortable. There was only the two of us. There was a five-mile run into the base for work, but we had a very efficient, comfortable dwelling in Melville.





C: You were in Newport in 1948 at the very end of Spruance's presidency of the Naval War College. Did you ever come down to the College? Did you ever see him in that capacity?

W: Yes, I did. We called on him shortly after we had arrived because of family connections, having known the Spruances, and we were entertained in their house several times. I used to attend lectures which were open, depending on our clearances. I must have attended eight or ten different lectures at the college on tactical or operational topics. I would see him at the lectures, listen to his words of introduction and so on. We arrived in the last part of his presidency. I was present when he finally departed, retiring on June 30, 1948. I was one of the spectators who saw him off the base here with a small ceremony; he didn't want any ceremony, but he still had a great many people out to see them off. They were a well-loved couple. I was also present at the wedding of his daughter, Margaret, and the reception that they gave in Quarters A.

C: Was the Naval Base fully deactivated, so-to-speak, from its war-time status? Had this had been accomplished by 1948? You mentioned the changeovers in Melville.

W: The Naval Base had been largely put back on a peacetime footing, but the important point is that before the war, there were no ships based in Newport all year round. Starting in 1946, about one third of the peacetime Atlantic Fleet could call Newport a homeport, which meant ships could be here regardless of the season of the year. The Naval Base grew up along that line. It was a peacetime base with a supply depot, with additional housing,



W: including some hastily-constructed government quarters built out of barracks that had been put in for the wartime attendees at the Coddington Point Precommissioning Center. So it was in transition, and the Naval Base was very active as a ship's support facility until the fleet left here in 1973. One of its jobs was supporting our General Line School where we had 600 students plus staff and we, in turn, were using former wartime buildings for that large school.

C: So the base was very active at this time period.

W: There was a two-star admiral normally in command of the base.

C: Yes, you mentioned Admiral Cooley.

W: The War College president was senior officer but paid little attention to the details of running the base. As Senior Officer present he had a social side and official duties when people visited, but he was not the base commander.

C: Correct, this had changed over the years. You still summered in Jamestown during this time period and managed to go over there quite often.

W: My mother lived in Jamestown. She had, sometime either during or probably just after the war, winterized her house, so she made that her headquarters. We were frequent visitors during the summer, and our first child arrived in 1949 and we'd take her over with us every time we had a chance. My mother seemed perfectly happy to have us where it was usually cooler, and it was always nice to be visiting with a grandparent.





C: Did you take the old ferry from the ferry slip in downtown Newport?

W: The ferry was still running then. The west side bridge had been put in to Jamestown in 1940, but the ferry was still a means of getting from Newport. At times I would go over in the War College boat. At that time the Naval Base ran a boat for War College personnel every working day to pick people up at eight o'clock in Jamestown and bring them back about four thirty in the afternoon. I would make use of that boat when we were staying over there.

C: Oh, that was very convenient. Was there only one public ferry between the ferry slip and landing in Newport and Jamestown?

W: In the busy months, they could run as many as three. I mean there was only one route. They'd run as many as three during the summer and in the winter one very hour and it would start at six o'clock in the morning and would stop running about nine at night. People who had to get over at other times, could go up around Providence on the west side and come down to Newport.

C: The long way. By 1950, you were assigned as CO of the destroyer JOHN R. PIERCE, part of the Sixth Fleet. You described this as one of your best duties, your most enjoyable duties. Can you tell me where you cruised and why this command was so special?

W: I guess anybody's first destroyer command is probably special and it was actually my only destroyer command. In fact, it was my first real destroyer duty, and I felt very fortunate to have been assigned. Because of war time



W: detailing and so on, I had not been in small ships. But when offered command of a destroyer and I grabbed it.

I left the Line School just as the Korean War broke out. Actually the Line School closed right after I was detached and did not ever reactivate here in Newport. They had already started a second Line School in 1948 in Monterey, California, and through 1948-1950 were running two line schools. The Korean War was probably a good excuse to close down this school. They had a full class almost assembled here at the time the war broke out. But with recommissioning ships, they grabbed all their officers. By that time I was already on my way to the PIERCE via four weeks of instruction at Key West at the Fleet Sonar School. I was fortunate in taking a ship well organized and not having to put one in commission, which a lot of my contemporaries for this Korean buildup did. They pulled a lot of ships out of the Reserve Fleets. My ship sailed for Europe two days after I took command, and we had six months in the Sixth Fleet holding down the NATO side while most of the effort was being put out in the Korean War on the western side. It was a good cruise. It was my first experience both handling the destroyer and in operations in the European area except for Midshipmen cruises.

C: Who was the CO of the Sixth Fleet then?

W: Admiral John Ballentine. We ran a routine over there that is quite similar to what they do now, in that the Fleet exercises and goes into ports, and then exercises and goes into ports. My squadron went over as a unit and pretty well stayed together. I was lucky in two assignments that took me on my own, one to Trieste to be the station ship for two weeks in the free territory in Trieste, which at that time was a very tense spot between





W: Yugoslavia and Italy, and then the second trip to Northern Europe for six weeks. We left the Sixth Fleet in early December and went up to report to Cincelm for North Europe duty. That entailed a trip into the Scandinavian area of Denmark and Norway, standing by in case the new NATO commander, General Eisenhower, needed any transportation or communication support. This was in early January; the weather wasn't the best to cruise in that area, but it turned out to be a good cruise and excellent experience for all of us.

C: And you were on the JOHN PIERCE for about a year, is that correct?

W: A little over a year.

C: Then you found yourself in the Pentagon in a desk job for three years. It was from 1951 through 1954, working on the staff of Admiral Carney. Your job there sounded very interesting from my reading. Can you tell me what it was and what your title was?

W: I took my destroyer through the European cruise, came back to Norfolk for a yard overhaul and then took her to what we call refresher training at Guantanamo and was happily, happily on my part but not on my wife's part, waiting for deployment to the Western Pacific. At that time the Atlantic Fleet sent quite a few ships to Korea on a rotation basis. Then suddenly I had a call from the detail officer, who happened to be B.J. Semmes, future Admiral B.J. Semmes, who knew me slightly, and he said he had a very fine job for me in Washington and I'd be getting orders within a week. I protested over the phone, as everybody does. He said: "No, you'll travel a lot, this will be most interesting." You don't argue with him, so I went off to





W: Washington to find out that I was going into the International Affairs section of the office of Chief of Naval Operations to relieve one Commander Dick Colbert, who is well known at the war college here.

However, somewhere along the line, Colbert's orders had already been cancelled. Colbert's orders to be the aide to the CNO had been changed in that the CNO, Admiral Forrest Sherman, had died suddenly. The new CNO took another aide, so that I ended up in the International Affairs section with a desk right next to Dick Colbert's. It was good in that he helped me get settled there. It was bad in that I had to share a desk for the first two months, but that happens often in the Pentagon. True, it was a comedown from being commanding officer of a destroyer. But in retrospect, it was a very good thing, because I found out later that I had been slated to go into the Naval Communications System again. I would have been counting radio frequencies for about two years in Washington. Instead I worked in the upper echelon, being a staffee or "sword carrier", if you want to say, for people like Admiral Count Austin, Admiral Smedburg, Admiral Burke on occasion, and several other well known names. Admiral Ingersoll who was later President of the Naval War College was two echelons above me, but he liked the secretary in our office so would stop in every morning and say hello.

Life in the Pentagon was completely different than life at sea. I enjoyed that particular tour which sometimes meant late hours; it certainly was not conducive to a regular driving pool and so on. We bought our first house out in Arlington, Falls Church, about twenty minutes commuting time from the Pentagon. Our second child had been born then; she was a baby in Washington, and all in all, it was a worthwhile tour. I will say that B.J. Semmes informed me that I would travel a lot, and the only travelling I did was over



W: to the State Department across the river. I knew a lot of the State Department people that way.

C: I was going to ask you if his promise of travel came through, not extensive travel anyway, just very, very local.

W: One thing of interest, I was present when Admiral McCormick, later President of the War College, became the first Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, when that command was formed in Washington in 1952. He was then Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet and he also donned his NATO hat there in ceremonies in Washington in the Departmental Auditorium.

C: So your three years in Washington were brought to a close in 1954. Then it was back to Newport again for another five years, 1954 - 1959, and you, I believe, were assigned to the Air Defense Command as part of the Continental Air Defense System in charge of eight destroyer escorts. From my reading, you had an office on Goat Island, which is kind of interesting. Can you tell me about this position and what your responsibilities were, your duties, and a little bit about Goat Island itself, which was formerly the site of the Naval Torpedo Station?

W: Yes, if I can regress to a point that I missed on the tour in the Pentagon. Dick Colbert left after I had been there a year, but it was during that time that Admiral Burke was the Director of Strategic Plans, and while Dick and I did not work directly for him, his office and my boss's office, who was Admiral Austin at the time, worked very closely. It was then that Dick





W: and I both were working on NATO matters. NATO was still really in the formative stages and it was then that, I believe, Dick Colbert got his inspiration for what later became the Naval Command course up here.

C: Oh, how interesting. Do enlighten us on that.

W: I found this out later; he had worked up a staff study when he was an action officer for Admiral Burke. On international matters that went before the Joint Chiefs of Staff when Burke was representing the Navy, Dick often went with him and helped him with the preparation of papers. Burke wanted an international source to get Allied planners thinking together to do this. Dick did a staff study on a joint or combined college. Eventually this found its way into a curriculum up here during Admiral McCormick's period when Dick was a student and Burke, by that time, had become CN.

C: It's very interesting that this idea germinated during that tour of duty and, of course, it's blossomed ever since 1956 when it got started. You also mentioned Austin, Count Austin, Bernard Austin, Admiral, who was president of the War College a little bit later on. Can you shed any light on his character, personality, abilities, any impressions, whatever?

W: I have the greatest respect for Admiral Austin. When I was in Pearl Harbor in 1944, Admiral Austin was the Director of Administration for Admiral Nimitz and he was the one that gave many orders that affected the type commanders. He was known as Count then, and he was the youngest flag officer in the Navy. He had the rank of Commodore, and he was known by all the staff including myself. He was a man to be avoided. When things went wrong we would hear



W: from Admiral Austin or his immediate assistant. I was somewhat under trepidation when I reported to my job in Washington in 1951 to find that he was the deputy of my division and I speedily found out that he was a man to respect and also, but not necessarily, to be scared of. He was an understanding man, he was very courtly, he was smart, and the first assignment he gave me was to prepare a staff study on "infra-structure" in NATO. I'd never heard the word, but in about two weeks, with help from my immediate boss Captain E.M. Eller, we prepared a briefing on infra-structure. I doubt that it shook anybody's ideas, but at least it acquainted all the rest of the division as to what infra-structure meant and the status of it in Europe at the time. Austin then became division director where I served for a year and a half under him. Then he was relieved by Admiral Bill Smedburg. In those days, quite often the deputy would step up to become the division director which was a good system in the Pentagon bureaucracy. Both of the gentlemen were very fine to work for and I never saw the side of Austin that I feared so much, that we heard so much about in Pearl Harbor. I later ran into him as president of the War College on a later tour in Newport again, then again in Washington. When he came to the War College in 1960, he had one of the best backgrounds of any president coming here. Right up to the end, he was a great gentlemen.

C: Yes, that's what so many people have said who still remember him - that he was very courtly and very gracious and very much the gentlemen. At least that is the impression that I have received from people.

W: He was a sharp and incisive gentlemen, also.





C: Well, I guess we're back in Newport again. That was a very nice digression. But it's 1954 and you're going to be in the area for five years, your first assignment being with the Air Defense Command. Can you tell me about that?

W: I was assigned to the Destroyer Force as an Escort Squadron Commander, which was a logical step up from having had a destroyer. I was still a commander. I had not come up for selection to Captain. My Escort Squadron 16 was based here in Newport and consisted of six destroyers escorts that had been completely modernized for air defense work. Air defense in their case was radar picket work. We'd used radar pickets with the carriers during World War II, special destroyers. These pickets were designed to stay at sea a long time and give early warning to the continent itself, rather than to an actual task force, although they could do the same thing for a convoy or task force. They couldn't keep up with carriers. Those six little ships rolled very badly.

At the time I took the squadron over, we manned two stations off our coast about one hundred miles out, and worked with the Air Force in the air defense business. I had an office on Goat Island in the one Navy building that still stands there now and these ships would go out for a week and come back. My job was to see that they made their commitments. I worked for the Air Force on doctrine, policy changes, operational changes, and conducted the training of these ships. It was a busy job. I had two officers on my staff and three enlisted men. I would ride one or another ship quite frequently out but normally did not stay out on a full picket patrol with them. There wasn't really room for a senior officer aboard and extra people were in the way. I went down to Guantanamo and the San Juan area for three weeks with three of them; we had some tactics down there while the others held the station off the coast.





W: The squadron gradually enlarged to eight ships while I was still there. It was an interesting job. I did some traveling and went out to the Continental Air Defense Command with Admiral Burke on a trip. Perhaps one of the best parts of it was meeting Admiral Burke and getting to know him. He came up here as a Force Commander about this time and met with his commodores frequently. We didn't realize at the time, but when he took three of us out to Colorado Springs to visit the Air Force, they must have had initiation. The Air Defense Command really laid out the red carpet for Admiral Burke. Three months later he became Chief of Naval Operations. He was the youngest CNO at that time.

C: What were your impressions of him personally?

W: Just the way you read it in the book. He's still going.

C: Yes, he still is alive.

W: He had all the attributes of both a leader, a gentlemen, and a very savvy officer. I observed him to some extent in Washington when I knew him as a rear admiral, but I didn't see as much of him or get as big a grasp of him as I did later on.

C: I see. You continued, I believe, on the staff of the Destroyer Force but next as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations.

W: Well, I went on from the squadron when I was selected for Captain in 1955. I knew my time was about a twelve month assignment at that time. I think



W: Admiral Burke and others would have liked to have us stay on longer. But the bureaucracy of the Navy kept things moving and they wanted to get as many people through commands as possible. I was originally ordered to be Chief of Staff for Flotilla 2 up here for Admiral Walter Price. In the meantime Burke had become CNO, and Admiral Joe Daniels had taken over DESLANT, another fine destroyer gentlemen. He was not as intuitive or forward thinking as Admiral Burke but nevertheless a great man. My friend Semmes had arrived then as his Chief of Staff.

Rather quickly I found the job of Readiness Officer on the Staff of Commander Destroyers offered to me instead of the Chief of Staff job with the Flotilla. Actually I did not have the choice; I was ordered to it. It was probably a better assignment and I certainly learned more in the long run on the Destroyer Force Staff. I was there three years, first Readiness and then Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations. We kept pretty close touch with Washington and we were always on a project. We even had dealings with Admiral Rickover to get a nuclear ship.

C: Did you have any success in that?

W: Eventually we did. I had one interview with Admiral Rickover. I rushed down to Washington once on the weekend with one of our material officers; I represented the operational side. We went down to tell Admiral Rickover what we wanted in a nuclear destroyer. We started out by showing him a great big artist's portrait of the ship and the only words he said was: "Young man, that picture isn't worth a blank, blank, blank," and threw me out of the office. But within five minutes we were talking to his staff down there; we had all the figures and so on. Out of that came the Destroyer BAINBRIDGE





W: about two or three years later. We were great ones to be able to show something; the picture works the problem, but then Admiral Rickover didn't go for any artist's conception of the destroyer of the future.

C: I guess he was just as tough to deal with then as he probably is now.

W: He wanted to get nuclear power in surface ships but not at the expense of submarines and he would not give up. He was probably right in this; he would not take any short cuts in the design of surface ships because of the safety of the nuclear reactors.

C: Oh, surely. Certainly a point well taken. So you spent three years on the staff. Did you ever go out to sea during this time period?

W: On occasion, yes. I made trips to Guantanamo. Our actual flag ship was the tender YOSEMITE. They said that ship was aground on her own coffee grounds off Melville. We went to sea once or twice. We went on a nice trip to Bermuda once, in 1957 for one week. But most of our job was office work and getting around inspecting ships and so on.

C: I see. But your chance to go to sea would come very soon because in 1958 you were named CO of the USS GRAND CANYON, which was part of the Sixth Fleet again. Can you tell me about that command? You were involved in the Med and in the Lebanon crisis during 1958.

W: I went to the GRAND CANYON from the job of Assistant Chief of Staff of Operations. At that time Captains had what was called a deep-draft command;



W: it might be an oiler, a transport, a destroyer tender. As I remember that year also Admiral Lyman, Chief of Staff of the War College, wanted me to come down here and take over the administrative officer job at the college. It sounded pretty good to me, because I probably would have gotten a diploma also. But my boss, who was then Admiral Whitey Taylor, another famous destroyer, officer, a great athlete, and a former Chief of Navy information with a lot of World War II experience, said: "You take that Tender command while its offered to you, take that command." I had no real objections, the GRAND CANYON was a good ship. Also many tenders really didn't leave Newport in a year. But GRAND CANYON's schedule included a trip to the Mediterranean working with the Sixth Fleet for about four months. I happened to be over there right after the Lebanon crisis, although we didn't actually get to Lebanon. We were in Suda Bay Creek, which is one of the bases the Greeks are protesting now. It's not really a base; its a NATO anchorage there. We supported ships that were operating off Lebanon and would come back for fuel and repairs. With the GRAND CANYON I visited, besides Suda Bay, seven other Med ports. I had a very interesting two days in Suda with twenty German Officers who came down to observe the Sixth Fleet. The German Navy then was just joining NATO and many of these men had World War II experiences on the other side. We had quite a time talking to them.

C: Was there friendly feeling, or was there still hostility?

W: No. They were postwar officers; there were some of the older types, the submarine commanders and so on. It was a very interesting two days. They were interested in seeing where the Germans had landed in Crete in the airborne invasion. We showed them the island. The Germans lost an awful lot





W: of people in those parachute attacks. There's a huge cemetery there in Crete. The ship went to Izmir, Turkey, to Athens, and Piraeus, Greece, Naples, Barcelona, Gibraltar, and then home. It was a good cruise and the ship needed to get away from Newport for awhile; then the rest of my cruise was basically here. We were the first tender to base for two months up in Fall River. They wanted to expand facilities, and we went up there where the Battleship MASSACHUSETTS is now. Destroyers came up to Fall River.

C: But that never really materialized as a destroyer base or port.

W: By that time they had enough pier space. Piers were not originally here in Newport. All the ships were anchored out. We lost people in boat accidents in the winter. One of the big projects was to get pier space for ships in the winter. Berthing here is so much easier for maintaining and operating a ship and upkeep along-side a dock than having to use a small boat for some.

C: Now when you say they were berthed out or off the piers, do you mean they were berthed in the bay per se?

W: Yes. There were a lot of buoys in the bay in the 1950's where the ships would moor, just like the pictures you see of the fleet when it used to come up in the summer. They were always anchored out; there were no pier berths here.

C: Well, that ended your tour in Newport. Did it not?





W: Yes. I was ordered to Europe in June of 1959.

C: You were going to be on the staff of the U.S. Commander-in-Chief in Europe in Paris as a communications plans officer.

W: Yes. The communicators got hold of me again; I still had my code, as they call it. I went over to Europe in July of 1959, reporting in over there. At that time the Commander-in-Chief Europe was also the Supreme Allied Commander, which he still is, and it was General Norstad, Air Force, at that time. He had an Army Deputy who was a four star General, who had his own US Headquarters, which is still the case. The US Headquarters was Camp Des Lages, in St. Germaine-en-Laye, outside of Paris. The SHAPE headquarters were about five miles from us, so we had close contact with the NATO staff, but I was on the US staff.

C: Where did you live during this time period? Did you find a home?

W: We lived in a little town, Vaucresson, which is a suburb of Paris. We found quite a nice apartment completely unfurnished. It was called the apartment DeGolf and looked over the beautiful St. Cloud golf course on which I was never allowed to play. The French were exclusive at St. Cloud; we lived there for almost two and a half years. It was about five or six miles from work. My children for a year and a half went to a French school and learned French. Actually we had a very pleasant life over there. I thought I might be forgotten professionally, but it turned out o.k.



W: I worked for General Willy Palmer and his brother General Charlie Palmer, two four star Generals, austere gentlemen. I rarely saw General Norstad. He occasionally would put on what we called his "U.S. hat" and come over, but most of the time the Army General ran it. I had a Navy admiral who was the communications officer for the whole command and he had a small group of us; I was his planner. We did basically the same work that went on in the Pentagon. We called it Pentagon East, but I travelled quite a bit. Sometimes the family went with me, sometimes alone.

C: Did your travels take you throughout Europe?

W: Yes. With the family I was able to visit Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Spain, and quite a bit in France. With General Palmer on three occasions, I went as far as Pakistan and Iran and once Turkey and once up in to Scandinavia. We had Military Aid Groups (MAHG) in the various countries and when the General made an inspection he used to take an officer from each of the staff divisions, again "sword carriers" as we called them, but very interesting and I saw quite a bit of Europe. Each service had a component commander, Navy in London, the Air Force in Wiesbaden and the Army in Heidleberg and I visited those headquarters at least once a year on various business. We went to London on six different occasions on orders.

C: Did you ever socialize at all with any of the French?

W: Not too often. It was basically an American staff. We had a very fine French, whatever you want to call her "au pair"; she wasn't really a maid, she was a well educated girl.





C: Au pair girl maybe?

W: She was almost an au pair. She came in five days a week and talked French; she'd learned a little English. One of her children is our godchild now. She lived down in the village. Her husband was in the Army for the first two years. It was a lasting relationship there. We watched her two children grow up; they're now twenty-three and twenty-one years old.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

W: My wife met her through the Junior Guild. There was an American Cathedral there, Episcopal Cathedral, where the French worshiped as well as the Americans and we met some people through that. Also we had many visitors coming through, the Secretary of the Navy. Admiral Burke came over twice when he was CNO. All the destroyer men that we could find in the Paris area gave him a party at our Camp des Loges club.

C: Did your mother ever come over during this time period? She was a world traveller.

W: My mother came once in the first year we were there, but she died the second year in 1960. I had to come home for a very brief visit. I got home just before she did die. She came over and spent two weeks in 1959 living nearby us. She had come back from a trip down to Africa, so she stopped in Paris on the way back.

C: How convenient. So your tour there, your three years was enjoyable?



W: It wasn't quite three years long.

C: Two and a half years of enjoyable, career enhancing work. For the next ten years or so you held a variety of interesting and different career positions prior to your retirement in 1971. Can you tell me what your assignment was after you returned to the U.S?

W: I stayed another year in France. At that time John Kennedy came in as President. Back tracking just a bit, I was the first non-Army Officer to be the President of the Eucom Officer's Club. Now that doesn't sound like a very big assignment. But it was an extra job. This was basically an Army club on our post. There were a lot of other people and General Palmer got the idea he wanted to make it really a "Joint club". I remember my own boss, Admiral Bruton in the Navy, saying: "Jack, you can plan all you want, but I want you to run that club well and we'll take care of some of the lesser assignments where you're working for me directly." So I had a year as President of the Officer's Club, which was an eye opener, and at that time we had a great plan for expanding. To carry through, we were going to get a two hundred thousand dollar new club and so on. General Palmer had done a lot of fund raising from his component commanders. He wanted a good club there where he could entertain. Jack Kennedy became President in this time and he said: "There's too much flow of gold going out of the country." Some disgruntled wife wrote to him about this big project of building a fancy club in Camp des Loges in France and all of a sudden we found ourselves with no club. I thought that ends my career as far as General Palmer was concerned. Out of this also came a reduction in sending dependents to Europe. They'd send officers over for about six months and were very sparse on sending dependents over. The idea being we'd cut down the American population spending money.





W: My orders were coming up for change of duty to go back to sea. The detail officer said: "How would you like to take command of the Cruiser SPRINGFIELD in the Mediterranean. She's homeported over here and you could just move your dependents down till you're already over there, and we won't pull your dependents back." I jumped at that cruiser command. I had not really thought I was in the running for particularly a missile cruiser because I was not a gunnery specialist. Springfield had terrier missiles, so in March of 1962 we moved down to Villefranche on the Mediterranean and were there almost another year. The ship was not in port all that much, but it was a very fine tour of duty and professionally an excellent one.

C: And you lived on the Mediterranean coast, which must have been exciting.

W: We lived in ST. JEAN FERRAT. I guess I was in port maybe a fifth of the time. My wife and occasionally the children came around to other ports the ship went into. We were the only ship in the fleet really homeported there in Europe. All the others rotated over and back.

C: And you cruised mainly the Mediterranean then.

W: Yes. We made one cruise outside to Morocco, Lisbon and Rota, Spain. We had special flag quarters. I had Admiral Dave McDonald as the Sixth Fleet Commander. I'd never known him. I knew his Chief of Staff who was a contemporary of mine from the Academy. Admiral McDonald was not used to cruisers. He was a carrier admiral, aviator and most of his staff were aviation-oriented. He was a fine man to work for and very rarely criticized





W: the administration of the ship. On a cruiser you usually have pretty experienced people; I had two fine executive officers. We operated at sea with the fleet and normally with one carrier and for the first four months of the cruise Admiral Hayward, "Chick" Hayward, was our tactical commander often.



Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the Naval War College

Interviewee: Rear Admiral John Wadleigh, USN (RET)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the Navy in Narragansett Bay

Date: June 13, 1985

C: This is the fourth oral history interview, with Rear Admiral John Wadleigh. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I am the Curator of the Naval Historical Collection. Today's date is Thursday, June 13, 1985. The interview is taking place in my office in Mahan Hall.

Rear Admiral Wadleigh, during the last interview, at the very end of it, you were talking about the SPRINGFIELD cruise in the Mediterranean which you wanted to finish up. You mentioned Admiral John Hayward in connection with that cruise.

W: I did because Admiral Hayward had so much to do with the War College. To set the stage just a little bit, SPRINGFIELD was the fleet flagship and permanently based in the Mediterranean. At any time the Sixth Fleet was tactically operating, SPRINGFIELD was a part of the Carrier Task Force now





W: called the Battle Force of the Sixth Fleet. That meant that tactically our ship was under the senior carrier commander in the Mediterranean, who for about the first five months of my cruise was Rear Admiral John Hayward, Commander Carrier Division 2. I operated tactically under him during this period, saw him socially on several occasions, learned to know him as a dynamic and brilliant operational commander and a difficult task master at times for screening ships. One reason was he expected SPRINGFIELD to react as a destroyer would react and the cruiser just handles a little more slowly and does not have quite the acceleration that he was used to with the destroyers.

On one occasion we all went to a fantastic party at Mrs. Jay Gould's in Cannes, France. Mrs. Gould was really a "grand dame" American in retirement over there. She frequently asked officers of the Sixth Fleet in for dinner with their wives, and we were privileged to be there on two occasions. One was with Admiral and Mrs. Hayward and members of their staff as well as the fleet staff. One interesting thing was that Mrs. Gould's house was built over the main line railroad and everytime the French Express Trains went by underneath, the house would really shake. She had a fantastic art collection; it was one of the things that we were shown and there were, as you might guess, numerous guards around even though we were all in uniform and we looked pretty trustworthy. It was one of the experiences of being a flagship commander over there, which I don't think too many other ship captains had the privilege of taking part in.

C: A look at the life of the super rich.

W: It certainly was. Mrs. Gould lived for another four or five years, I think. She must have been in her mid eighties by that time.



C: I believe I recently heard that her art collection was going to be auctioned off or sold. That was on the news rather recently. It was an extensive collection.

W: Along that line, we made interesting port calls with Admiral McDonald. Our ship could go into ports where the carriers couldn't and the fleet commander frequently would take the flagship and visit smaller ports in the area. In the summer of 1962 we cruised into the Adriatic, stopping at Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, and Venice. In Venice we entertained various people including the former Assistant Secretary of the Navy John Nicholas Brown and his wife who were touring over there at the time. Admiral McDonald was Mr. Brown's aide when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy back in 1946. I am trying to think who the fabulous American over there was Peggy Guggenheim who had a gallery in Venice. She came out to the SPRINGFIELD to a party we gave aboard ship. Incidentally, we used to call parties in the Sixth Fleet aboard ship "Foc'sle-Frolics", because you could serve no alcoholic liquor which the foreign citizenry we entertained had a difficult time really understanding. The same is true now, probably all for the better. However, Mrs. Guggenheim came out in her own private gondola, and came along aside, and we had some trouble getting her aboard because the gondolas were not made to go along side cruisers in a harbor. However, she was helped aboard and was shown the hospitality of the ship by Admiral McDonald.

C: That sounds very interesting - your cruising in the Mediterranean in the SPRINGFIELD in 1962. I believe you were next assigned as Chief of Staff of the Commander Cruiser Destroyer Atlantic Fleet Force, is that not correct?





W: Yes, and that had an interesting background in that the Cruiser Destroyer Force was based here in Newport, and the SPRINGFIELD was one of the ships in that force for administrative purposes. Sometime after I had taken command, Rear Admiral Robert Speck, who was the Force Commander, made a tour of the Sixth Fleet and was our guest in the SPRINGFIELD for two nights. He was responsible for the administration and the logistics support of my ship, in particular its maintenance funding. He gave us a thorough materiel inspection while he was over there. We entertained him ashore; he and Admiral McDonald had not really known each other but everything went quite well. I did not think that I would ever see Admiral Speck again. The SPRINGFIELD was an expensive ship being deployed in the Mediterranean, an expensive ship for the type commander to take care of and I knew that he did not like to spend all the money that a flagship requires for support of an admiral and staff aboard, but we did all right. To keep your Administrative Commander and your Tactical Commander pleased was treading a pretty fine line. Lo and behold five months later, I had a letter saying I was going to be ordered as the Chief of Staff to Admiral Speck back here in Newport.

C: Would the SPRINGFIELD go with you?

W: No, the SPRINGFIELD would not go with me. My relief was ordered and the ship stayed in the Sixth Fleet. It was a promotion up to be the Force Commander's Chief of Staff. It also put the shoe on the other foot because now I would be worrying about the money that the Fleet Commander was asking for. That led me into my tour here in Newport from 1963 to early 1964.

C: Was your position there strictly administrative?





W: Yes, as the Chief of Staff. This was an administrative staff. We set doctrine and the material instructions for the ships. We had over two hundred ships of 20 classes in the force scattered actually around the world in 1964. We had ships that were deploying to Southeast Asia as well as in the Mediterranean. The staff had about sixty officers. We were based on the destroyer tender YOSEMITE here in Newport, but we also had offices on Pier 2 of Coddington Cove. I was fortunate to have a set of quarters just above the pier, in the housing up there. It was a pleasant tour, but a bit hectic at times.

C: Did you have any travel connected with this?

W: Occasionally I visited ships of the force in Keywest, Mayport, Charleston, and Norfolk which were our bases. I did not go abroad.

C: So that was a one year tour?

W: That was a little less than a year. During that time Admiral Speck was relieved by Rear Admiral B.J. Semmes, whom I had known personally and had worked for in earlier times in the Destroyer Force. I stayed with him until early 1964 when I was ordered back to Communications in Washington.

C: Right, that was your sub-specialty and you seem to be re-entering that field again for a little while. You mentioned that you were Deputy Director, Naval Communications in the Navy Department.



W: Yes, that was in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. By that time my old boss, Admiral McDonald from the Sixth Fleet, had come back and became Chief of Naval Operations so that the same faces were turning up. Although I was about seven echelons down the line in Washington from Admiral McDonald, I did see him off and on. I was Deputy Director there for almost two years and was selected for admiral during that tour of duty.

C: During that time. Can you give me the exact year in which you were selected?

W: I was selected by the selection board of May 1965.

C: Was there anything during this time period in Washington that was outstanding as Deputy Director of Naval Communication? Any major problems that you had to face and cope with, this was the Vietnam era again?

W: Yes, I went into Naval Communications relieving Rear Admiral Richard Pratt, who was an old friend of mine. He had just been selected for admiral at the time and I went in to take his job. My boss was Rear Admiral Bernard Roeder, one of the most brilliant communicators we had. He was also a tactician, not a communication specialist. About five months after I got there, the Tonkin Gulf incident took place. Our whole outlook of communications and everything else changed.

C: Could you tell me how it changed, in what ways?





W: It changed in that our focus suddenly became Vietnam, in trying to provide fleet communications and I would almost say a fire drill to boost up everything out in that area at the expense of normally keeping the fleet operating in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world. My job again was administration and there were also new equipments spurred on through research and development (R&D). I was a Deputy and the work much the same as I'd done on the Destroyer Force, the number 2 and the Chief of Staff as well as the Deputy. Roeder was a brilliant man and he was well liked by Admiral McDonald and the Deputy Chiefs of Naval Operations. We never had enough money to do everything; we had one continuing battle which I guess still goes on between the Materiel Bureaus and the Chief of Naval Operations as to who's going to set the pace, who's doing this. I think things are a little better now. At that time the bureaus had all the money and the Chief of Naval Operations had a continual battle to get them to spend it the way Naval Operations required. That may be over simplifying it, but it was a basic fact.

C: You continued in Defense Communication work?

W: I was selected when I was the Deputy Navy Communicator. They normally tried to have a communication qualified admiral in each year group or every other year group so they would have enough officers to fill what were known as communication billets. I was not a specialist. In fact, there was only one Navy communication specialist who was a flag officer; he was in the cryptography side of the special duty officer. I was selected with the idea that I would fill a communication or two communication billets in my time as a flag officer. The minute I was selected I was ordered to the Defense Communication Agency where there was a vacancy for a Communication qualified



W: admiral. I went into that and was "frocked", the term "frocked" meaning you get your stars without the pay, to go over as Assistant to the Director of the Defense Communication System, DCS. That in turn was under the whole Defense Communication Agency.

C: Now is this a civilian agency?

W: No, it is part of the Defense Department. It was headed by a three star Army General. He had six flag and general officers over there: two Army, two Navy and two Air Force. I worked for Lieutenant General Starbird, a brilliant Army Engineer Officer who was an administrator and organizer. He was one of Eisenhower's favorite colonel's in World War II, only about four years older than I was, I think. He was a dynamic guy, but he worked himself to the bone. I was with him for two years, first as a Deputy in the Defense Communication System and then as Operations Officer for the System.

C: And that was from 1965.

W: Sixty five to sixty seven, I was there a little over two years.

C: Sixty-seven then. Was there anything outstanding about that position in the Pentagon? Any troublesome problems that you faced during the Vietnam Era?

W: I learned about long-haul communications. I had background from my duty in Eucom and I learned a lot more. The Army and Air Force were represented by Career Communicators in that business, Signal Corps in the Army and the Air Force Communications Service specialists. The Navy was represented by Black





W: Shoe Officers who were sub-specialists and had very little what you call long haul communication experience. I had some excellent assistance, I had understanding bosses. Probably our big problem was satisfying the "whiz kids" of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. This was the McNamara era. He had a bunch of fast thinking, fast talking, not always practical assistants, what we called the "whiz kids". To bring them down to earth was a continuing problem.

The Army and Air Force knew their long haul communications; the Navy was more interested in making sure that the fleets were served. If I can mention, the LIBERTY incident took place while DCS operations were under my control. I must admit that a lot of what took place was at lower levels where the tactical communications came into play. They were not part of our responsibility in DCA.

C: You mentioned the LIBERTY incident. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

W: It was at the time of the Arab Israel war in 1967. I am trying to think how to approach it. The DCS had the responsibility of insuring that the long haul system was working, the actual routing of messages and so on filtered down to the commanders concerned. Much of this was automatic even at that time. At this stage I would not even want to comment on what went wrong with the LIBERTY. There have been books written about it. At least one segment thinks the Israelis wanted to get the LIBERTY out of there regardless of which nationality; others put it on errors in communications. It was the one time I saw the inside of the White House when I went over with General Starbird to the Situation Room. Here almost twenty years later, it's a little difficult





W: to exactly reconstruct what was going on then; there were also other communications involved through the National Security Agency, which was not under our ken at all. This makes it a little difficult to really give you a worthwhile story on that.

I did make two trips to Vietnam where DCA had a good piece of Vietnam communications; we were responsible for having the point-to-point circuits and the cable circuits that went out to Vietnam. I went out twice and had a view on what was going on in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967.

C: Were there any major snags in communications? Would you say this was a problem during the Vietnam conflict?

W: Yes, communications was always a problem. Satellite communications were just coming in. We were certainly improving everything but never fast enough to suit the bosses in Washington. This was the time when Lyndon Johnson wanted to talk directly to the man in the fox hole, to the fighter pilot, to the landing craft on the river. I think it is still true that when you do try to run the war from Washington by one man, you can only have trouble. I think one observation that I'd make is we improved the volume of communications that could be sent back, so much so that most addresses did not have time to absorb them, including some almost instantaneous traffic coming back.

C: Flooded with information.

W: Flooded with information that could not be properly absorbed.

C: That's a problem, information blitz.



W: We are having it right now in 1985, the fact that so much of it is highly classified. We just had this recent spy case where a lot more people were cleared for security than were actually required.

C: Right. You spent a couple of years in the DCA and then you returned to cruiser destroyer commands.

W: As soon as I was promoted, I started putting on my preference card that I wanted to go back to sea as a Flotilla Commander or whatever sea job would be open. By that time Admiral Semmes had become Chief of Naval Personnel; in fact, he had become Chief of Naval Personnel shortly after I arrived in Washington. He was promoted, taken from his job up here in Newport on short notice in 1964. In 1967 they promoted a qualified communicator captain, who took my place in the Defense Communication Agency. It was my turn to rotate to sea and I went to the Atlantic Fleet. I was given Flotilla Four in Norfolk.

C: What did that consist of?

W: I was Commander Cruiser Destroyer Representative in Norfolk as well as Commanding Flotilla Four there.

C: How many ships were in Flotilla Four?

W: When I took over, we had six Flotillas in a Force of some two hundred ships. There were about thirty ships in each Flotilla. We had the Norfolk destroyer tenders, three cruisers, and the three squadrons of destroyers.





C: And you were CO?

W: I was commanding the Flotilla. I did not, in that job, actually go out to sea and maneuver them around. The Type Commander and the Administrative Commander ran the ships when they were back on the coast and we sent these squadrons or ships abroad to the Fleet Commanders overseas, the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Seventh Fleet in the Far East. Then for a while in Norfolk, I took over Flotilla Twelve; it was a rotating or tactical Flotilla and I had about three months of tactical work, being double hatted.

C: Then you had both jobs?

W: There were plenty of admirals in the Navy, but they never seemed to have enough to fill the fleet spaces; they were always putting them into Washington where the Navy had to keep full representation. So I had Flotilla Twelve for three months and that included ships that were taking the midshipmen cruise, for the summer of 1968. This was a very interesting assignment. We cruised in the Caribbean and off the east coast. Interesting also compared to my own cruises, thirty years before.

C: Things have changed rather drastically.

W: It changed in one way, in that there were many more ships involved and we didn't always operate as a compact group. When I was a midshipman we had two ships; now we had about fifteen ships involved in cruising and we took part in the fleet exercise under Vice Admiral Semmes who was Commander Second Fleet. We visited several ports. My flagship went to San Juan and New York. I was



W: embarked in the Cruiser NEWPORT NEWS for that cruise, which was most interesting.

C: That was a unique experience.

W: I was proud to have it, and I was lucky to have it, too. All of my contemporaries did not necessarily get to sea, although some of them got more than I did. I had this one cruise; then I had two years of the Flotilla in Norfolk, which was interesting because there were always personnel problems, ship problems. We saw a lot of the NATO Command in Norfolk. That's when my classmate, Dick Colbert, was the Deputy Chief of Staff for SACLANT. It was at that time, I think primarily through his influence, they established what they call the NATO Standing Force Atlantic of NATO ships.

C: So you feel he played an enormous part in this.

W: I know he did. I know he played a real part. That NATO Force made their first visit to Norfolk in the spring of 1968 and my flotilla was their host. In other words, they came into our piers there. The Commander was Captain Jeffrey Mitchell RN and Dick Colbert was Deputy Chief of Staff for SACLANT and handled the visit. We met them and we entertained the ships. There were British, Canadian, Dutch, German, and U.S. ships in the force. They were there about four days and it was a good opportunity to observe the ships in the other Navies and our own ship. Some of the British ships were more modern than ours. We had a World War II destroyer in there at the time. The NATO Force is now in it's 18th year; it's one of the solidifying parts of the NATO Alliance. It hasn't had to go into action as a NATO force, but it's certainly a great training ground.





C: Yes.

W: Colbert was a visionary in this and I think that's what he will be remembered for, not only as the President of the War College up here but also as the most NATO minded admiral in our Navy.

C: Certainly.

W: Probably more than the other navies. This all generated from way back when he was in Washington and in the Naval Command Course that he took over here.

C: Yes, he certainly was a force in international officer education.

W: We'd been in Norfolk there a year when he was ordered up here and promoted to vice-admiral as President of the War College. I think Admiral Hayward had a lot to do with that in that he recommended him as a relief. Dick was an officer who had vision and who had years of active duty left.

C: Someone who would be forward thinking and make a impact on the institution, which he certainly did. Did you socialize with him at all during this time period?

W: Yes, we had known the Colberts personally and we saw them in Norfolk. About the time they left, we moved into the house next door to where they lived. They lived in one area of the base. That was another thing; the admirals there all had quarters which was something in the old days no





W: officers on sea duty ever had. We had, I think, twenty-two flag officers in the base area of Norfolk, which shows you how many admirals there were running around.

C: Sure. They all had to be observed. You then spent from sixty-seven through sixty-nine in the flotilla.

W: Sixty-nine in the flotilla, and I thought I might be going back to Washington. I certainly had not put it down on a preference sheet, and I was not picked to become Director of Naval Communications, which would have been the next step. I went to Commander, Training Command, Atlantic Fleet in Norfolk in 1969.

C: So you continued in the Norfolk area. How long were you working as Commander of the Training Command?

W: I was there two years and then I retired in 1971.

C: Can you tell me anything about this last assignment of your active Naval career? Just what did the job entail?

W: To put it very succinctly, the Commander, Training Command was the school master of the Atlantic Fleet. There is a similar one in the Pacific Fleet. The job generated during World War II on both coasts from what was called the Commander of Operational Training. When so many new ships were coming into the fleet, mostly from the Atlantic initially in World War II, they established this Operational Training Command primarily to shake the ships



W: down and get them ready for war. That generated into a peace time command, where again the job was to train ships and train their crews. Where the original command had trained new ships only, the training commands after the war took over specified schools that the fleet ran, like radio schools, signal schools, and in each major port what they called a Fleet Training Center. In Newport, we had a Fleet Training Center; we had one in Norfolk; we had one in Charleston. Those centers had, depending on usage and numbers of people, individual schools within the center. There would be a school on ship handling, another school to brush up on CIC etc. It was not basic training. Basic training was still in the training stations and Bureau of Personnel schools. These were for people who came ashore from the ship either by the day for their school or maybe came ashore for a week.

So I had eleven or twelve schools up and down the coast, including the most important one which was a Fleet Training Group in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. That Group was where the ships reported after they had been in overhaul, or reported as brand new ships. The Training Group operated ships as its pupils for six to eight weeks, what we called refresher/shakedown training.

C: Refresher or more intensive training after being at sea.

W: It was a fascinating job. Again, it was mostly administrative, but I worked with people. I was there during the Navy's big change of pace with the advent of Admiral Zumwalt, who was the young Chief of Naval Operations who jumped some fifty or seventy admirals, Admiral Moorer's relief as Chief of Naval Operations.

C: How did you view his tenure as CNO? He was controversial and still is.





W: Yes, he and I were actually selected for admiral at the same time. He was six years behind me in age and year group and was the Secretary of the Navy's aide when he was selected. He was a dynamic man; he had a lot of ideas and had had a Flotilla Command in 1965. Then he was in Washington in advance planning, and then went out to Vietnam as Commander of Naval Forces; then he came back to be CNO. I didn't know all that much about him but I learned. Here was an innovator who was personnel oriented, a thinker. I think one of his failures was, if it was a failure, that he fired from the hip quite often. He instigated a youth movement in the Navy.

I wasn't sure I might stay on after 1971. I thought maybe the communication business might need me again, but the selection board kept going younger and younger and other communication admirals had been selected. After I had six years as a flag officer they said very politely: "We would like you to retire." I think that Zumwalt tended to over assert himself directly to the young enlisted men without worrying about the officers and petty officers in between, particularly the commanding officers, in that a lot of his directives were aimed straight at the lower level. He had an idea that the Navy should go with the trend in the country, which was longer hair, more relaxed discipline and so on. He used the word "chicken regs," which sailors understand. Everyone could understand. The Navy was built on discipline and there was a tendency to think: "Well, I can get away with it." If you let sailors go ashore in dungarees the next step is the dungarees are going to be dirty and you are going to look like hippies and so on.

I was in a very unique spot to get the feelings of enlisted men because in my Training Command we had all sorts of young people coming through as students, but we had a very hard core of Senior Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers as instructors who were top career people. We were quite often able



W: to designate our instructors and get the pick of the group; the Bureau of Personnel was good to us that way. So we had good instructors in each of our training centers, training groups, and they were teachers. They'd been brought up in the Navy, most of them were twenty/sixteen year men, and they had a tough time adjusting to some of the regulations where if the sailor didn't like it, he might end up at mast, but he might be able to talk his way out of it. That was my off the cuff evaluation.

In my last year I went around to each of my groups and we had, as Admiral Zumwalt directed, "rap sessions". I don't know if he ever spelled it out that way, but I would have rap sessions with the instructors and I usually got the feedback that they didn't feel that they were being backed up at the top. I realized that right in Norfolk. I had four different schools and I used to go to them about once a week or once every other week, not necessarily talk to people, but see what is going on. You know what is taking place pretty quickly. Their students, they felt, were not coming in properly motivated as they should be. It looked like, not a break down, but the chain of command was being by-passed.

C: Oh, I see. That would have a deleterious effect on discipline and order within the Navy.

W: I think with hindsight that that's gradually changing; there was a swing back. When Admiral Holloway relieved Admiral Zumwalt, there was a trend back. I don't like to use a parallel but there was a trend up here at the college when Zumwalt's man Stan Turner came in, and then there was a trend back after he left with the follow on presidents.





C: Yes, that's true.

W: I think now we are back to pretty much what we were before. There are some Zumwalt modifications that stayed with us. Certainly Secretary Lehman and Admiral Watkins have swung the other way. Uniforms are just one example. We went from everybody looking like chief petty officers back to where there are sailors and chiefs. The Navy is not really a democratic organization. The Soviet Navy is just as good an example; they aren't democratic either.

C: That's true. You retired from your billet as Commander, Training Command in 1971 in Norfolk. Where did you decide to settle?

W: Well, I knew of pending retirement about six months ahead of time. In fact, I was up here in Newport when I got the word that I would retire in June or July. I was up here for a change of command at OCS where one of my good friends was taking over the school there. I thought about where we wanted to go, we had a home up in Newport. But I immediately thought of Annapolis, being near Washington; we had a lot of friends there. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do. I knew there were consulting jobs in Washington. I thought I'd like to write and that's what I started working on. We thought Annapolis might be a good place to go initially. Our daughter, Marjorie, was still in college, our younger daughter. My older daughter, Anne, got married very early and she was with us on occasion, but we didn't see too much of her. Marjorie had been in college two years down in Norfolk, but her friends were up in the Washington area. I suppose if someone had offered me a job, or if I had really looked for a job in Norfolk, we might have stayed there. We liked Norfolk, except it was awfully hot in the summer, so we centered on Annapolis and went up and found a house there.





W: We went there really without real sights on making up a second career. I knew I wanted to write. I fortunately did not have to start earning additional income and I had a pretty good investment in an apartment in Washington. I thought about going back there, but my wife was not interested in getting back into the Washington scene. We sold the apartment and were in Annapolis for about two and a half years. During that time I held a part-time consulting job in what they call a "think tank" up in Washington. It was interesting, but the commuting wasn't. I did not really want to put my nose to the grindstone.

C: Commuting is difficult from there, an hour at least.

W: I did some writing. I took a writing course, actually a correspondence course for a couple of years. I never received a diploma. I got into various non-profit projects in Washington and Annapolis such as "Historic Annapolis." We worked with the Military Order of the World Wars, Naval Academy Alumni Association, St. Anne's Church, etc. I wrote for the Naval Institute several times. We kept quite busy down there.

C: Annapolis is a lovely town.

W: But we had our property here, up here in Jamestown. We came up here each summer. We also set our sights on travelling when we could. My wife's only trip to Europe was when we lived there. I found that coming up here every summer and going back, we were sort of living two lives, getting involved with activities down there and involved up here. Then in 1974 we decided to move up in the Newport area and we became interested in a Doris Duke's Foundation house here.



C: Oh, the Restoration Foundation.

W: We rented a house for a year, which went into three years. That's when I became involved in various activities, including Seaport '76 which occupied most of my time.

C: I wanted you to comment on that. Since you've been here you have been very active in community affairs and naval affairs. You mentioned Seaport '76. You have been president of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association and involved in clubs. Can you comment a little bit on that as well as your historical writing?

W: Yes, the Seaport Foundation really grew as part of the National Bicentennial. It is probably the organization that I spent the most time on. It was both frustrating and rewarding. It goes on now under the leadership of the third president, Captain Howard Kay, who has been there seven years. I thought three years was enough for me. Actually I started having eye trouble, not due to that necessarily, and in 1978 Admiral Weschler took it for a year. Then Captain Kay took it. Seaport '76 was a well thought out enterprise to make Newport's maritime history more visible. I say well thought out; it was actually started by John Millar, the Newport historian, a young man. I almost considered him as an adopted son because we came to know him very well. With the HMS Rose, John was not a businessman, but started the concept of Seaport '76. His concept had much grander scope than what was practical. I realized that the world was full of non-profit organizations and that, unless you have a "godfather", an industry that can really take you under the wing, an historic maritime museum is a long process. I think a good example of that is





W: the Mystic Seaport; it is now fifty years old. It has grown into a large organization. Newport was full of competing organizations and I think we were probably pretty lucky to get to our present status where we have an operational ship with some state support. That ship, sloop PROVIDENCE, I think, has done pretty well in carrying out what Millar and other people envisioned, in other words showing Rhode Island's maritime history off to the nation. There is still a lot more of the nation to cover and we hope the state will back us up more each year. PROVIDENCE has been an excellent public relations project for Rhode Island. The other organizations that I was interested in were the Naval Academy Alumni and Trinity Church, which I had been a member of off and on since I was seven years old.

C: Do you hold an office in Trinity?

W: Not now. I was a vestry-man in Trinity. I was asked to join the Trustees of the Naval War College Foundation, although I am not a graduate of the War College. The War College history was a major project. I was queried by Admiral Stockdale on that in 1978. A writing friend of mine, Captain Paul Ryan, who writes for the Naval Institute often mentioned my name to Jim Stockdale and out of that, SAILORS AND SCHOLARS began. Talking to Jim and Professor Fred Hartman, we got Tony Simpson into it, and in early 1979 we started.

C: That was the Centennial history.

W: Yes. I don't have a degree in history, but it is my favorite topic.



C: And are you continuing to write?

W: Yes, the projects now will be somewhat limited compared to writing a book.

C: But you are continuing your interest in this area. You are also a member of the Newport Reading Room, I believe, and the Clam Bake Club.

W: Yes, we joined Newport organizations. It is a unique community; Newport still has its three communities: Navy, town, and Bellevue Avenue, or however you want to call the summer colony. We have fringes on all three of them. There were very few people who were members of all three of them in the old days, but they are gradually growing together now.

C: Right, they are expanding, and they are taking in people from other sectors. Are you a member of Quindecim?

W: Yes, I am a member, I have been a member. I joined that a long time ago because my father-in-law General Seth Williams, was secretary treasurer of it in the fifties. He loved that organization; he took it very seriously.

C: That's basically military, isn't it?

W: No, half and half, half military and half civilian.

C: And what is its purpose?

W: Well, it is a men's club for discussion. We get together once a month and





W: all members are supposed to contribute with a talk every now and then. Its purpose is to discuss current topics. It had a lot of Navy retired people who started it along with some people from the avenue. I guess you could call it a discussion club, that is probably the best definition. They meet once a month eleven times a year and now they hold one meeting where we ask wives, which was unheard of for the first thirty years.

C: Times have changed. Admiral Wadleigh, we've got about seven more minutes before this tape is over and I would like you to comment on the evolution of the Navy in Newport over the years. You have had a long association with this community and can tell us how it has changed since the thirties and on into the eighties. Do you think the changes have been positive? What new directions has the community taken and also the Navy in Newport? I wonder if you could give us an overview of this in the remaining time?

W: Let me take the Navy first. The Navy in Newport has been here for years. In Newport's three hundred and fifty year history, the Navy had not been ashore here until the Naval Academy came here for the Civil War. It was followed by the Torpedo Station on Goat Island. When I was a child here, the permanent Navy was relatively small. There was the War College, Torpedo Station, and Training Station; there was also an army presence in Fort Adams. The fleet did not come here except in the warm weather, every summer.

After World War II, the Navy expanded. With the placing of a major air station over in Quonset, Narragansett Bay became a Naval Base, you might say, for year-round operations, and after the War a third of the Atlantic Fleet was based here, making this a strategic Naval Base. The Navy then grew to some extent here. The base stayed pretty much on a level, with the War College as a tenant on the base and the torpedo station.





W: And then in 1973 there was a sudden pullout of the fleet and closing of Quonset. In the Post-war period, the economy of Newport had become largely centered on the Navy and the government presence. With the pullout of the fleet, everybody tore their hair and names were called back and forth. It was a fairly sudden job and it was done very abruptly. They were talking about it for so long before it's a wonder that people were so surprised when it happened. The closing of Quonset was a shock. I was in Norfolk when all the talk was going on, but I did not think they would close down a major installation such as Quonset on such short notice. Newport has recovered from that very well. People still should remember that, although the ships don't come in here, the Navy still is a very important part of the naval establishment and it is a center of training and education as the name implies. I think someday in an emergency, Newport is still a key strategic spot. That is a pretty fast overview.

C: It takes in the major points.

W: Yes. I think people have to remember that Newport is a Navy town. It was only a Navy town in the summer until World War II, then year round. Now I think the town economically has recovered, also Aquidneck Island has. Now when one talks about putting in extra ships here, everybody tears their hair for what it's going to do to each town's services and taxes and can we handle it.

C: Yes, that's true. It seems to have come full circle in the last twelve years.



W: It's rather complicated to try to pull it all together in a few words. The city of Newport is not much bigger now than it was when I was a child here. The population still has three elements; we have a fourth element in the population now, the tourist, and the large floating population, which is much larger comparatively than the Navy ever was when they were in and out each summer. I think one of the major problems is one that Admiral Eccles mentioned in his interview: overdevelopment and trying to keep the rather placid, calm life of Newport and so on as a non-industrial city. Keeping that going and not being overrun by swarms of tourists is a problem. Transportation is so much easier now; that's another factor.

C: Yes, very definitely.

W: I would like to say in closing, I'm just now going through the MERCURIES of a hundred years ago doing some research about the War College, getting a little more on the first War College class and the things that went on here then. The town then was probably two thirds the size it is now; the way they wrote things in the media was quite different. But Newport, I think, will survive the tourist and settle back down again. Yachting has become so much more a part of the summer up here than it ever was. The number of people who can afford boats has increased.

We've got a new element coming in and that is coastal tour ships, not to mention bus tours that come in here in large swarms. These little coastal steamers are starting to come up on a weekly basis loaded with passengers. I worry a little bit about all the condominiums that go up. Will they be filled with tenants, particularly timesharing? Who's going to want to buy a timesharing condominium on Newport's shore for the winter?





C: That's true. There may be overdevelopment in that regard; I think the condo market and the timesharing market is saturated. I guess that's bringing changes to Newport.

W: Strictly a non-War College comment is that I can't help thinking how as the population gets older, it gets harder to get money to educate the youngsters. I was thinking of Newport schools, the constant fight between school committee and town council. In my days I don't think there was a separate school committee; there may have been, but I think that the town council and the people set the education requirements.

C: There wasn't a separate school committee to do that.

W: That's purely a non-naval philosophy.

C: Right. Admiral Wadleigh, I want to thank you very much for sharing your reminiscences with me. I've enjoyed these four hours and I look forward to having the material transcribed and made available to researchers. Thank you.











